DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 752 EA 028 257

AUTHOR Kushman, James W., Ed.
TITLE Look Who's Talking Now: Student Views of Learning in Restructuring Schools.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR. School Improvement Program.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Feb 97
NOTE 222p.
AVAILABLE FROM Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 SW Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204 ($14.75).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Data Analysis; *Data Collection; Elementary Secondary Education; *Learning Motivation; *Learning Strategies; *School Restructuring; *Student Attitudes; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Since 1988, a team composed of staff from 10 educational regional laboratories, teachers, administrators, and students have worked to become a learning community. This report describes the development and activities of the restructuring collaborative that gathered information on students and learning. Chapters 2 through 8 present case studies from an elementary school, three high schools, a network of reforming schools, a group of reform-minded teachers, and a survey of Kentucky students. The case studies represent the views of over 1,000 students from diverse communities and schools on school restructuring. Methods included interviews, small focus groups, surveys, and observation. Chapter 9 discusses common themes that emerged from the case-study data: (1) Students are keen observers of how people relate to each other within the school walls; (2) a variety of learning styles exists, which necessitates providing a variety of learning activities; and (3) students continue to view success in school in very traditional terms. Chapter 10 discusses how schools can systematically gather information from students in a short time, outlining three "data-in-a-day" strategies for gathering, collecting, and analyzing data. Twenty tables are included. Appendices include copies of the interview guides, the survey instrument, and contact information. (LMI)

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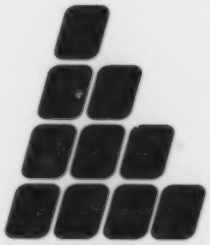
Look Who's Talking Now

Student Views of Learning in Restructuring Schools



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Look Who's Talking Now:
Student Views of Learning in Restructuring Schools

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February 1997

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[1] The Restructuring Collaborative is a national network of staff from regional educational laboratories and educators and students from throughout the US. The purpose of the collaborative is to increase the knowledge of educators and laboratory staff about the processes and results of restructuring efforts in K-12 school systems throughout the country. The work of the collaborative and preparation of this manuscript were supported by funds from the US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of OERI and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Acknowledgments

This work was indeed a collaborative effort involving not only the authors, but many other people from regional laboratories, schools across the country, and other agencies. From the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, special thanks is due to Tony Kneidek who served as technical editor, Linda Gipe who helped with final edits, and Jerry Kirkpatrick who helped bring together this LNP publication.

The authors wish to thank many people from regional laboratories and other educational agencies who assisted in data collection, manuscript review, or otherwise provided inspiration and support for this project. Special thanks is due to the following individuals and groups:

Catherine Awsumb, Research for Better Schools
Wade Brylnelson, California Department of Education
Kathy Busick, Pacific Region Educational Laboratory
John Buttram, Collaborative on School Change
Pamela Cole, Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Susan Everson, Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
Margaret Fortune, California Department of Education
Nancy Fuentes, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
Ruth Hinson, Louisiana Alliance for Education Reform
Kentucky State Caucus, Appalachia Educational Laboratory Board of Directors
Rhonda Mordecai-Phillips, Research for Better Schools
Karen Simon, Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Richard Tompkins, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
Jaci Webb-Dempsey, Research for Better Schools
John Williams, Appalachia Eductaional Laboratory

Most importantly, this project depended on the involvement and cooperation of school personnel and students throughout the United States. We thank you all! We would like to give special thanks to the following individuals, who are listed alphabetically without organizational affiliation in order to protect the confidentiality of case study schools:

Carolyn Boudreaux
Sue Brown
Suzanne Cusick
Murtis Dennis
Sheri Funderburk
Deborah Gallagher
Esteban Garcia
Meitter Gibbs
Roberto Loredo
Cheryl Montagnino
Maryann Overland
Angela Rattler
Cynthia Rattler
Kirsh Reinhardt
Tia Robertson
Belia Rodriguez
Linda Swindle
Adriane Tullier
Austin Whipple

In addition to these individuals, we would also like to thank the following study participants:

- Students, staff, parents, and community members of schools participating in the Every Student Succeeds initiative in California
- Teachers and principals from the Northeast Assessment Working Party
- Students, teachers and principals of Kentucky schools

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Chapter 1

Learning What Students Think About School Restructuring

Robert E. Blum
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Becoming A Learning Community

So you want to know what students think? A group of us – staff from regional laboratories, teachers, administrators, students and, in a small way, university professors and parents – have been learning how to find out. Over a six-year period, we have become a collaborative, a team of people spread across the country working to bring students and their voice into school restructuring efforts. Students, teachers, administrators, and regional laboratory staff have all been involved at various times and in various ways.

This book, a product of the collaborative, has a focus on students – what they think and how they can become leaders and participants in school reform. The book also tells the story of how the collaborative evolved, including what we did and what we learned. It is a rich source of information for anyone interested in bringing students into their school improvement processes, or wanting to know what students think, or wanting to learn how to collaborate.

The story began with staff from each of ten regional educational laboratories coming together to clarify thinking about school restructuring, a hot topic in the fall of 1988. Two-and-a-half years later, the first student appeared in the group. When this student started to work at our sides, we began to see our own work from a new perspective. We came from two different worlds, but we learned from one another, and our joint work was richer. This first direct involvement of a student in collaborative planning was a turning point for us. Here is how that experience is remembered, first from a student's perspective, and then from the viewpoint of a regional laboratory staff

member. Dan, now a sophomore in college, recalled the meeting he attended in May, 1993:

> My senior year they [the collaborative] flew me to Boston where all the regional labs were meeting. All the big mucky-mucks were in this board room with the big table and the oak paneling. They were all there, and we went to the Harvard Club for dinner. You have to be a graduate of Harvard to be there, and I was there, too. Coat and tie required, and I didn't even know how to tie a tie. I had my mom do it so I could just pull it up when I got there. So there I am sitting around with the mucky-mucks eating dinner at the Harvard Club in Boston, and I have my hair down to here [shoulder length], my blue blazer, and my tie. I was totally out of my league, and I heard people whispering, 'Is he the student?' I was terrified.
>
> I started asking people questions of my own. 'Where did you start as a teacher?' 'Who decided to get you into education?' And one of the guys said he was planning to work road construction, and then decided to go to college. And everyone has had those teachers, those leadership experiences, that brought them up to the level they are at.
>
> [referring to the next day] And they were all sitting around arguing about something, arguing about how to implement some program. I said, 'I have an idea. It's called sticky-dot voting, where you take all your ideas, you get them all up, and you paste them all over the room. I learned this in leadership camp. You take the sticky dots, and everyone votes, and the most votes wins.' And they're like, oh, that's a good idea. Good ol' sticky-dot voting, junior year leadership council, and these education mucky-mucks hadn't heard of it. So we did sticky-dot voting, and it was great.
>
> I learned that student leadership is about students bringing a fresh perspective, an incredibly fresh, new perspective about leadership. . . .

Joan, one of the researchers at the same meeting, remembers Dan's involvement:

> One of our group had this brainstorm that it would be wonderful to hear first-hand from a student. We invited Dan, who had been working on a district leadership team in Washington State, to come to Boston with us. At first it was a little awkward to have him be part of the group. I was concerned that we were either boring him or were using too much jargon. But I found that we explained ourselves more when he was there, and being clear was an excellent grounding for all of us as well.
>
> In the middle of our second day together, we had brainstormed so many ideas and were just not coming to closure. It was a frustrating moment for the group. We were trying to take into account the perspectives of all the schools and district staff and the labs from different parts of the country. Dan and his sticky-dot activity helped us reach agreement. He led us through the activity, which helped us state our preferences in a non-threatening and participatory approach. It was perfect. Dan was proud of his contribution. As a result, he also was more willing to share his perspective as we finalized our research design. I think we all left that meeting with a new awareness about what student participation can mean.

Dan's involvement in the Restructuring Collaborative was a beginning. It was not easy, and it took way too long to get to the point where students became regular participants in collaborative work. Ironically, even though participants in the collaborative

agreed early on about a focus on student learning, no students were involved for well over two years.

From Competition to Collaboration

Collaboration is about people with diverse goals, work, backgrounds, and values coming together around a good cause. When staff from the regional laboratories first met in the fall of 1988 to think together about school restructuring, there was no history of collaboration among the organizations. In fact, there was a 25-year history of regional laboratories competing with each other. Regional laboratories had learned how to compete very well. Collaboration seemed out of the question.

But many of the individuals who attended the first meeting knew one another. They believed there was a good cause: clarifying ideas about school restructuring as a service to the education profession nationwide. There was also a short-term, common objective to develop a two-hour presentation on school restructuring for a national convention. The stage was set for collaboration.

Participants began the process of coming together by talking about the school restructuring work of their regional laboratory. The discussion turned quickly to our short-term objective: the presentation. It wasn't long, though, before our personal rather than organizational beliefs about learning, teaching, schooling, and restructuring emerged. We found that we held many beliefs in common. For example, we all believed that restructuring should focus on student learning rather than simply providing the opportunity to learn.

In this one-day meeting, we outlined our presentation and assigned follow-up tasks. Over the next several months, participants added detail to the presentation through a write-review-rewrite process. Everyone contributed and everyone critiqued the work. As the final step in fine-tuning the presentation, we rehearsed. This was risky business. Asking nine people whom you did not know well to critique your presentation was threatening. The rehearsal put us all on equal footing. We worked as a team to weave nine individual presentations into a cohesive whole. People learned a lot about each other and we began to develop trust through the process of working together.

The presentation was a success. We agreed to continue working together to expand the ideas into a longer, more in-depth workshop. We set another short-term objective, a one-day institute at another national convention.

Developing a day-long institute was more challenging. We had to find common ground on restructuring issues at a deeper level. We agreed on four key questions to guide our thinking and provide structure for the institute:

1. Why restructure?
2. What is restructuring?
3. How can restructuring happen?
4. How can the progress of restructuring be assessed?

Discussions resulted in agreement on key points related to each of the four questions. For example, the group agreed that restructuring begins with students, although no students were in the group. This raised additional issues and questions. What knowledge, skills, characteristics, and qualities should students develop through their schooling experience? How should day-to-day teaching and learning practices change to align with such goals? Finally, how should school culture change to align with student learning goals and day-to-day learning and teaching practices? We believed that all decisions in a school and/or school district should be guided by what is intended for students to learn. These common beliefs about restructuring continue to guide the work of the collaborative.

More happened during the year-long planning process. The ideas of all presentation team members blended into a unifying whole. Trust among team members increased. No one promoted a personal or organizational agenda. Meetings shifted from hotel and institutional settings to homes. The interaction, while intense, became more informal and comfortable. Everyone contributed, took on assignments, and completed them. Social activities became more important, sharing meals and having time for more personal conversation. The group became a team.

During this year, we recorded another success. The first product of the collaborative was completed: a set of training materials that could be used by

collaborative members and others interested in bringing clarity and focus to school restructuring efforts.

Renewal and Refocusing Collaboration

While we did not recognize it at the time, completion of the institute became a transition point for the collaborative. We agreed that developing and conducting single-event institutes, presentations, and workshops would not produce continued growth for the collaborative or individual members. On the other hand, we were not sure of next steps. We brainstormed in a debriefing session following the institute. Should we develop multiple event training programs? Should we shift from training to studying restructuring schools to gain new insights into the change process? We knew we had made good progress in becoming a collaborative.

After several months, about half of the members met to discuss continuing the work of the collaborative. Two key agreements were reached by the core group. First, we agreed to invite all regional educational laboratories to participate in the collaborative. However, we also decided that our work would continue regardless of how many accepted the invitation. Second, we agreed to study restructuring schools rather than continuing to work on training. We planned a meeting to design our new work and invited each regional laboratory to send one or more staff members to the next meeting.

The composition of the group changed at the next meeting. The group was larger and included several individuals from some laboratories and none from others. The team-building process began again: introductions, sharing the work of each organization, brainstorming, and agreeing on key ideas. We presented a history of the collaborative for the new participants and agreed to build from the basic ideas developed by the original group. We reached several key agreements and identified three broad areas for study:

1. Beliefs about what students should do and learn in school, including beliefs about learners and learning;
2. Daily life of students in schools and districts, with a focus on student perceptions; and
3. Cultural norms in schools and districts, including the history of school restructuring efforts and conceptions of change and change processes.

We also agreed to the following concepts about our work together:

- Student learning will drive all else;
- We will look at implications of student learning for the structure of teaching and learning, and school organization and culture;
- We must consider what students are like as learners as we move ahead;
- We will look at the relationship between structure and outcomes; and
- We will become a learning community
- We will involve school and district staff in our work and in product development.

Finally, and most important, we agreed to continue our individual research and to allow the ideas of the collaborative to influence our individual work. We agreed to publish the work of all participating laboratories and to provide analysis across all of our work.

Widening the Circle of Involvement

At the next meeting, we devoted two days to learning a technique for mapping the history of restructuring efforts. In addition, we learned how to analyze the work in relationship to a framework for thinking about organizational development. This marked the first time school and district staff participated with laboratory staff in an activity of the collaborative. Participants were asked to write one positive comment and one suggestion for improvement as an evaluation. While the overall tone of the comments was positive, they indicated that school practitioners are action oriented and want to learn from each other about their restructuring efforts.

"The mapping exercise gives us a sense of what we have accomplished," noted one participant. "Also, being with schools across the country really points out that we all share or are wrestling with a lot of similar problems."

Having time to reflect on one's work was also time well spent. "Reflecting back was a wonderful way of looking forward," another participant said. "I had forgotten many things and was at the wall. Now I've gotten around it and am ready to move forward again. Milburn School, watch out!"

Participants also were eager to share information with a wider audience. "Spend some time letting states and schools intermingle and discuss what is working or not working for them," said one. In other words, share ideas.

Through a series of meetings, the collaborative moved toward common work. Staff members from each laboratory continued their work, keeping what they learned from meetings of the collaborative in mind. Experimentation with questions to ask and data collection techniques to use was under way in each participating laboratory. Sharing approaches to studying school restructuring focused increasingly on direct interaction with students. Surveys, interviews, and observations were the most commonly cited approaches to collecting data from students. Direct interaction with and involvement of students was here to stay, and group members continue using ideas and techniques learned from others in the collaborative.

In an April 1993 meeting, the group moved a step closer to broadening regular participation by school practitioners. Collaborative members agreed to invite one or two practitioners from selected schools and districts to participate in a meeting in May. It worked to a limited extent. A student, Dan, two teachers, four district administrators, and a university professor joined regional laboratory staff and shared research questions and methodologies. The group had a serious discussion about bringing student voices into school restructuring efforts.

Common Work Involving Students

The collaborative moved a step closer to common work: each organization agreed to use a common set of questions to collect data from students. The questions had a clear focus on students as learners and teachers, and schools as supports for student learning. The questions were:

1. Do you consider yourself a successful learner? In school? Out of school?
2. How do you learn best?
3. What are teachers/schools doing to help you learn?
4. What do you wish teachers/schools were doing to help you learn?

While direct interaction with students had increased, their primary role was as subjects of research. Students provided input through surveys, interviews, and observations. In the May meeting, this began to change. Dan was the first student member of the planning team. He made important contributions and gained from the experience. Having Dan in the room made the adults more aware of students and their potential as partners in the work

The role of students and practitioners in the work of the collaborative began to broaden. In addition to participation in Restructuring Collaborative meetings, some students became researchers. In two participating schools, they asked the agreed-upon questions and added locally important ones. Students, with support from school and laboratory staff, designed the research, and collected, analyzed, and reported the data. This became a real-life learning experience and helped school and regional laboratory staff understand how to support students as researchers.

Products resulted from both student research efforts. In one district, a videotape describing restructuring efforts included information from the student research effort. At a high school, student researchers presented their findings to the school site council and influenced at least one major decision to move from a traditional six-period day to a block schedule.

The collaborative continued work on a common product: a series of case studies describing the student-focused research efforts. In December 1993, participants shared their research in detail with each other. Preliminary findings from a study involving 450 middle school students by one regional laboratory showed the following:

- When asked about what makes a successful student, responses emphasized compliance, external rewards, and behavior
- When asked what kind of person they would like to become, students focused on such things as relationships (e.g. caring for others) and personal attributes (e.g. being smart, being happy)

The findings indicate that students have different mindsets about what success means in school and what it will mean in their future lives.

Findings by another laboratory through interviews with more than 400 students across all grade levels were similar to the above findings:

- When asked what makes a successful student, the answers were all over the place, but success is often externally focused (compliance, rewards, behavior)
- In talking about success, students doing well in school focused on good grades and academics; those not doing well focused on social situations

Two student researchers from a high school reported that student views of success ranged from coming to school, to being motivated, to balancing school and work. They also found that learning depends largely on how well teachers motivate students. In addition, students said they learn best when teachers relate content to their lives through personal stories rather than recite facts, when teachers understand what they are teaching, and when teachers really care.

Students involved in the collaborative found the work rewarding. Maryanne, a student member from Oregon, noted:

"It was very flattering, but at the same time intimidating, to work so intimately with people who did this research as a career, people who had Ph.D.s and years of education under their belt," she said. "After the San Francisco meeting, I realized that my opinion and results were important to the cause, I wasn't just the 'token student' on a research team."

At the December 1993 meeting, participants included four high school students, one teacher, six school building administrators, three district administrators, and nine regional laboratory staff members. Six regional laboratories were represented and there was at least one person from each of ten states.

During the December meeting, the group reflected on the benefits of the collaborative:

- Work of the collaborative has helped participants keep their focus on students and learning
- Networking with others at collaborative meetings has helped individuals validate their work and increased motivation
- The group is learning how to become a learning community, providing each person with new insights, tools, and techniques to use in their work

The collaborative is bringing all key groups – students, school and district administrators, and laboratory staff -- together for direct exchange about use and benefits of research.

From Sharing Independent Work to Doing Work Together

While the tone of the December 1993 meeting was positive, some students did not understand the purpose of asking questions and how the data would be used to improve schools. They indicated that the data needed to plug into school change and teachers needed to hear the results.

"I sometimes felt that our discussions were going in circles with no apparent end goal in sight," Maryanne said. "We were throwing ideas around, but I didn't see where we were trying to go, or that any progress was being made to get there."

This concern was not limited to students, and in part led to two key decisions. The first was that a panel involving a student, a parent, a teacher, school administrators, and laboratory staff would present the work of the collaborative at the 1994 annual conference of the American Educational Research Association. This is in stark contrast to the presentation by the collaborative three years earlier at the same meeting. In 1991, only laboratory staff presented ideas and theories. By contrast, the 1994 presentation panel involved a wide range of stakeholders who provided the results of common work.

The second key decision was for the collaborative to hold the spring 1994 meeting in a school rather than at the offices of a regional laboratory. A Southwest high school agreed to host the meeting. Moving the meeting to a high school set the stage for true collaborative work. We had been using the collaborative to enhance our own work, and we continued to develop trust and confidence in the group. However, until the spring 1994 meeting, each laboratory and the schools they had brought into the collaborative continued to do their own work. At the high school in Texas, the collaborative moved into a new phase. We worked together rather than doing work independently and sharing results.

Early in the morning on the first day of the meeting in the Southwest high school, collaborative members – students, teachers, administrators, and laboratory staff – combined with students and staff from the host school to form the research team. After reviewing the questions, the team broke into groups of two or three and interviewed between one and three students. A few small groups of researchers conducted focus group interviews with up to six students from the school. The full research team

reconvened and shared the results of their interviews. Analysis of the interview data was completed by sub-committees and shared with faculty and students from the school. The data collection, analysis, and reporting was completed before the day was over.

Key findings from the research effort included:

- All students interviewed said they were successful learners. The reasons they gave fell into five categories, including paying attention to rules, being motivated, working hard, being resourceful, and achieving well.
- When asked if they were successful learners outside school, almost all of the students said they were. Student responses fell into five categories: relationships to people, relationships to the environment, feedback, application of knowledge and skills, and choices and options.

Interview results indicated that students view success differently based on whether has been achieved inside or outside the school. This finding seems to confirm preliminary findings reported from two research efforts at the December meeting.

Student roles in the work of the collaborative expanded again. Some students were subjects of the research, and some were research team members with school and laboratory staff. One student from outside the host school served as a recorder and reporter for one of the analysis groups.

The collaborative was still learning how to investigate the three areas agreed upon more than two years earlier: 1) what and how students learn, 2) day-to-day learning and teaching practices, and 3) school culture and climate. Most of the effort to this point had focused on talking directly to students and bringing their voices into restructuring processes. The Collaborative expanded its effort to include classroom observations with student interviews.

A high school in Oregon agreed to host the next meeting in the fall of 1994. The collaborative designed a process to observe classrooms, then interview between four and six students. Half of the students were selected because they seemed to be engaged in the classroom experiences; half were selected because they had not seemed to be engaged. A research team similar in composition to the one at the Southwest high school was formed. Sub-teams collected and analyzed data, and reported findings.

Some key findings from this research effort were:

- In general, students felt that teachers believed that lectures and group work would encourage student learning. The students reported that, from their perspective, doing projects or labs were more helpful learning activities.
- Students preferred group work to individual work because interactions during group work provided them with experiences that built life skills, teamwork, and communication.
- Some courses, such as Global Studies, were seen as much more relevant than others because they dealt with real, current events. In general, science and math classes were not viewed as relevant to student's future careers, even for students who expected to pursue careers in science.

We conducted one more research effort with another new twist. A high school in Arkansas served as host for a research effort that focused on school culture. The first step in this effort was to figure out what cultural elements were important to the school. This was done in an evening meeting conducted the day before the research effort. Focus group interviews with staff and students resulted in seven themes to guide data collection. The next day, the research team, similar in composition to the teams in the previous two efforts, completed data collection, analysis, and reporting. The data collection and analysis focused on looking for evidence of the seven cultural themes and examples of how they play out in daily school life.

The result of this research effort was to find ample evidence of the seven cultural elements in classrooms and in life outside of the classroom in this residential school. The seven cultural elements – giving students and teachers choices, collaboration, problem solving, open-mindedness, reflection and self-assessment, challenging academics, and a family-like atmosphere – described the conditions for students' successful learning in the school. Beyond documenting the school culture, the discussion at the end of the day focused on new ideas for strengthening these elements and even moving beyond them.

Summary

Over the past six years a core group of people have worked to become a learning community, a restructuring collaborative with a focus on students and learning. In the process, individuals from several schools and districts have been involved. We have learned how to bring students, school staff, and laboratory staff together in research

efforts. We have learned how to work together with everyone contributing and everyone benefiting. We have developed trust, knowing that people will use the work of the collaborative to enhance their own work, but not claim personal or organizational credit for collaborative work. We have moved beyond competition. We are learning how to learn together.

Purpose and Organization of the Book

The remainder of this book presents the fruits of our work. The book is a resource for reform-minded practitioners and others who are interested in bringing students into school restructuring efforts. It presents both the results of our research and many ideas and techniques for schools or collaboratives to use in answering the question, What do *our* students think? We hope this book helps you include students in your restructuring work and in forging collaboration among educators, parents, researches, and others.

Chapters two through eight present case studies of the individual research efforts conducted by laboratory collaborative members. These chapters portray a wide variety of research methods to elicit the student voice. Many student quotes are included (and occasional teacher quotes) so that the results reflect the words and thoughts of students. Each of these chapters tells a story in itself with sections on:

- Setting the Stage (background, setting, context, student quotes reflecting key findings)
- Working With Students (data collection, student/staff involvement in the research)
- What We Learned From Students (results, lessons learned about the research process)
- What Happened With Student Data (how data were reported and used)

Chapters two through five tell the stories of research efforts at individual schools. At Dickinson Elementary School in Chapter 2, students from kindergarten through sixth grade reveal what they think about learning in this re-cultured school. The students provide confirmation to the faculty that sought-after cultural changes to create a caring, learning-centered school are indeed taking place. Royal High School (Chapter 3) tells the story of students taking charge of the research effort as they interview their peers and provide a critique of the school's current approach to teaching and learning. The most

interesting finding here is that virtually every student interviewed felt that they learn better outside of school than inside. Similar findings come from another high school in the Southwest (Chapter 4), but this time with the research conducted in a single day by the Restructuring Collaborative working with a school research team. This case demonstrates the importance of caring and positive relationships as a pre-condition for learning. Chapter 5 demonstrates various approaches to eliciting student views and how these methods evolved in an Eastern middle school. The case presents some surprising findings about how students learn best, and how they think quite differently about success in school and success in life.

Chapters six through eight present case studies of larger entities than single schools. Research across a diverse network of reforming K-12 schools in California is presented in Chapter 6. Interestingly, there are a number of common themes that cut across these various schools. The chapter also discusses research issues related to bilingual students. Chapter 7 presents the work of another type of network -- a group of reform-minded teachers who collaborate with laboratory researchers to include the student voice in school restructuring. The chapter demonstrates how to involve teachers so that eliciting student views becomes a natural part of classroom assessment. A statewide perspective is presented in Chapter 8 in which students answer questions about Kentucky state reforms and how these reforms affect them as learners. Here, students show they have mixed feelings towards popular reforms such as portfolios and performance assessments.

The seven case studies are the core of the book. In the interest of synthesizing these diverse efforts, Chapter 9 provides a discussion of common themes and learnings across the case studies. We divide what we have learned into some broad conclusions about the student data, and observations and lessons about conducting this kind of research on students from kindergarten through high school.

We end in Chapter 10 with a "how to" for school staffs who would like to conduct this kind of research on their own, but who face limited resources and time. The chapter presents different variations on a technique that the collaborative has used in three high schools across the country. The technique takes between a day and a day-and-a-half and

can be designed as a professional development activity to begin the process of including the student voice.

A list of author names and contact information is presented in Appendix D.

Chapter 2

Children's Voices From the Rainbow School

Shirley M. Hord
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Setting the Stage

If I were talking to students who were new at this school, I would tell them that to be successful they need to be nice and share.
---Kindergarten student, Dickinson Elementary School

A good teacher is one who cares for students; a bad teacher is one who doesn't care if you pass a test or not.
---Sixth-grade student

The teachers, parents, administrators, and students refer to it as The Rainbow School. In fact, the school had a rainbow painted over the second story doors, where steps from the ground floor on either side of the building converge to form a formal entry. However, it was not always thought of as a rainbow school, rich in the multicultural diversity of its students, families, and faculty.

Early Years

Built in 1923, the three-story salt box style building is located on the fringes of an industrialized area of a large urban city in the south (Hord, 1992). For several decades, it housed kindergarten through sixth-grade children, primarily of blue- and white-collar Anglo workers. Most families had two parents with the mother a full-time homemaker. Families and the school that served them were fairly stable until the 1960s and 1970s when white suburban flight resulted in near desertion of the school.

Attendance decreased so much that the school's third floor was used as meeting and activity space by mothers and others in the community. The school was hierarchically structured: A single authority and decision-making figure, the principal, was at the helm, and rigidity was the term most often associated with the school.

The Phoenix Evolves

Ironically, a proposal to close the school triggered its survival and revival when several determined parents negotiated with the school board to keep the school operating. The parents and school agreed to generate sufficient enrollment, and the board pledged to send a new principal, already known for turning one school around. The re-creation of Joshua Dickinson Elementary School as an open-enrollment school had begun.

Over the dozen years of Dickinson's reconceptualization, rebirth, and development, the faculty – with four principals' unique contributions (Boyd & Hord, 1994) – established a school that they refer to as The Dickinson Difference. Dickinson was founded on two initial premises:

1. The school would be child-centered and children's cultural differences would be honored. The school celebrated students' diverse talents, especially expressed in the creative arts (visual and performing); and its mission purposely targeted multiculturalism. The school would be arranged and organized to fit the children and their needs, and not the reverse.

2. A new authority structure would be developed where all adults in the school contributed to and shared the mission and vision of the school, and where decision making would be shared among staff, the school's parents, and community organizations.

Through the years, these principles have endured as the cornerstone of the school's mode of operation.

Essential Structural Elements

To support these approaches, several highly important factors were employed by the principals. One was the professional development of the staff. Teachers were provided articles, books, videotapes, speakers, and trips to sites to observe programs in action. The principals recognized that educators create visions from a rich knowledge base. If mental images of more effective curriculum, instruction, and learning settings for children are to be developed by teachers, they must have a deepening knowledge about these issues. Further, to make sound decisions about teaching and learning, all staff require expert understanding and insight into the implications of their decisions, as well as

skills of the decision-making process itself. Therefore, continuous staff development has become routine for the school's faculty.

A second approach recognized that if staff were to work – collegially, examining instructional practices, finding common ground on their vision, and making decisions regarding it – they would need a place and time for this to happen. Staff restructured the weekly schedule and arranged an early pupil dismissal on Thursdays. This led to the creation of Faculty Study, a time for teachers to learn together and grow professionally. As the school's attendance grew, staff considered converting its combined workroom, lunch area, and meeting space to a classroom. However, teachers decided that in order to continue Faculty Study, they needed the space to meet and discuss ongoing issues of concern. They understood that teachers must always be learning if children are to learn. Further, principals were firm in their belief that teachers and their needs must be respected if children were to be respected.

A second restructuring effort resulted in Morning Meeting. This daily meeting of all children and adults also included some parents who drop by. It takes place in the basement of the school. This may not seem like an appealing meeting place, but it is brightened by 400 children's colorful shirts, slacks, and dresses as they sit on the floor to begin the day. The agenda focuses on honoring children and celebrating their accomplishments. A first grader may read to the group from his or her newly finished primer. Third graders may report on a field trip; fifth graders may demonstrate their skills at peer mediation, used on the play yard to dispel contentious behaviors. At one Morning Meeting recently the principal kissed Miss Pansy, a pet gerbil, to fulfill a pledge when the school reached its United Way goal. School issues, concerns, and problems may be addressed briefly at the meeting, and national or state news events of particular significance may be discussed.

Faculty Study and Morning Meeting offer two forums for open discussion and dialogue. They provide the foundation for effective communication in the school, the development of caring relationships, and growth and development for adults and children. The school labels itself a family; without Faculty Study and Morning Meeting, the Dickinson family never could have evolved.

Ongoing discussions and broadly-shared decision making are made possible by Faculty Study. As noted, Faculty Study also makes it possible to have ongoing professional development, where members learn with and from each other. It provides the setting where staff consistently engage in critical inquiry, asking:

- What are we doing for our children?
- Is it the most effective means?
- Is there a more powerful way?
- Can we do this better?

Time in Faculty Study is also used by teachers to share ideas and assist each other in implementing new practices and procedures. Teachers also provide leadership and assist each other in putting new ideas into place. A shared and inclusive leadership has emerged, with each teacher taking responsibility for introducing new ideas, while supporting colleagues in their agreed-upon plans. As they share responsibility for all adults, each also takes responsibility for all the children – the Dickinson family, as it were.

Another structural feature is the school's management of open enrollment in order to maintain a balance of African American, Hispanic American, and Anglo American students. A small number of Asian American students are becoming part of the student population as well. The school's widely held multicultural mission and vision are used as the staff's standard against which all decisions are considered and made. A recent curriculum adoption was analyzed and weighed carefully in relation to its benefits and disadvantages in enhancing the school's multicultural mission while advancing academic achievement (Hord, 1993).

The school has been successful in moving many of the modest number of students achieving in the lowest quartile, indicated by California Achievement Test scores, to the next higher quartile. However, as already noted, the faculty's envisioned outcomes for students are much broader than scores on standardized achievement tests.

Having worked arduously for their vision of an appropriate culture or context for children, the faculty wondered if their perceptions of their work were accurate. What are we really doing as a school staff? What are we really like? and, What do the students think about their life in the school? Thus, when the school was invited to become a

research site, the staff welcomed the opportunity to have outside observers hold a mirror up to their school and their work, and provide reflections. They would be able to receive feedback. And there would be a means to get information from children through a more objective source.

Working With Students

Leadership for Change (LFC) researchers at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) designed a small study to obtain student information for the Dickinson staff. The LFC principal investigator at the Dickinson site and a SEDL intern made arrangements to spend several days at the school to gain students' perceptions of the school culture and views of their daily learning experiences. Study outcomes of interest to the staff were twofold: Teachers could examine the data to discover children's views of daily life in particular classrooms and, staff could look at data from all grade levels, K-6, to identify themes or patterns persistent across the school.

The school's management team identified participants for the study. The team is comprised of the upper- and lower-grade chairpersons, special education chairperson, the principal, a community representative, and a student. Team members selected four students per grade to achieve a balance in gender, ethnicity, and overall achievement at each grade level. Twenty-eight students, four each from grades K-6, were identified.

An interview protocol, developed and tested by Research for Better Schools (RBS), was selected by the research team to guide its interviews. (The interview protocol is presented in Appendix A.) The protocol's 65 questions explored seven topics: self-description, favorites, school, teachers, classroom, how I learn, and when I grow up.

The two researchers escorted four children at each grade level to the interview location where two were interviewed one-to-one by a researcher. The RBS protocol alternated between questioning students, and allowing them to construct a picture, poem, or story related to an interview topic. In the interest of time, interviewers generally served as "secretaries" for the students and scripted their responses. Student explanations of their artwork or other products were also audiotaped.

Student responses were transferred into text documents by word processing computer software. These raw data documents were entered into a computer program (called NUDIST) designed for analysis of qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The program organized the data into three grade groups: K-1, 2-3, 4-6.

Two-hour meetings with teachers of each of the three groupings were scheduled with SEDL researchers. The original student responses (raw data) were organized by protocol question for each grouping. This meant that under question one, there were four kindergarten-student responses and four grade one-student responses, each set labeled as to grade level. This arrangement was followed through the questions and grade groups. These sets of data were sent to teachers for their review several days ahead of the meeting. Teachers were asked to share their reactions and learnings, surprises and insights, and to suggest themes or generalizations from the data.

What We Learned From Students

Following the interviews with students, researchers shared responses with teachers and the principal. Summaries of staff reactions and comments in the three grade-group meetings follow. These summaries reflect what the students said and what the teacher reviewers paid attention to and learned. Some quotes are also included to convey the flavor of students' voices.

Grades K-1

If I am a good student in class, I get to be Kid of the Week and stand up at morning meeting.
---First-grade student

I come to school because you're supposed to learn and get an education. I do my Dickinson best.
---First-grade student.

I am happy at school because all my friends are at school.
---First-grade student

The teachers stated that the students' responses seemed authentic and believable. Themes they identified that reflected what they learned about their students included:

- Students hear their teachers and internalize their comments; teachers hear themselves through students' responses
- Students think positively of teachers and view them as helping them to learn and "do my Dickinson best"
- Students recognize the hierarchy of authority in the school (principal, teacher, student)
- Students clearly understand the schoolwide disciplinary policy and live by it; dependent upon their behavior and consequences of the policy, they feel some measure of sadness or happiness
- Students are aware of and think about societal issues, i.e., when they grow up they want to be in a helping career or profession
- Students used "good" or "bad" to make judgments with no shades of value in between; students generally characterize themselves as good, and this seems linked to the work teachers do to ensure every child is respected and honored, the aim being to develop strong self-esteem in each child

Grades 2-3

I do not want to do my schoolwork at the end of the week when my brain is flipping and flopping.
---Third-grade student

Something that I am so happy about is that my teacher came back (from maternity leave).
---Second-grade student

When I grow up I want to be a doctor so I can take care of babies and give shots, and be the boss.
---Second-grade student

As expected, teachers thought the responses of these students were more mature than those of K-1 grades. Teachers noted differences between second and third graders: second-grade students gave more concrete responses, whereas third graders expressed more abstract thinking. Unlike second-grade students, third graders could talk about making changes in themselves, i.e., not "being mean to my brother." As in the lower grades, second and third graders shared the same perceptions and understandings of the discipline process as the teachers. It was clear from their responses that the rules were understood and not just stated on classroom wall charts.

Other grade themes included:

- Students view school as people-centered; they talk about school in terms of their friends, teachers, principal – and not in terms of "things"

- Students express high self-esteem, feel good about themselves, and perceive themselves as creative
- Unlike K-1 students focused on reading, second and third graders favor a variety of subject areas and a variety of activities, indicating an increasing diversity of students' preferences for learning content and delivery
- Third-grade students are looking ahead and state that what they are currently doing will help them in the future; they are considering what they want to do in the future and relate this to why school is important
- Students of both grades expressed their concern and caring about the environment

Grades 4, 5, 6

To even be at school should be the best thing that ever happened to someone.
---Fifth-grade student

It is wonderful to be in school; you just have to be eager and wanting to learn.
---Fifth-grade student

It is important to me that I do well in school because you learn and somebody is helping you.
---Fourth-grade student

I learn best when it's quiet; if it's noisy, it's hard for me to pay attention.
---Sixth-grade student

As in the lower grades, teachers heard themselves in their students' voices.

Themes identified by the teachers included:

- Students are happy with Dickinson
- Everyone understands and adheres to a school-wide discipline policy that students have internalized
- Students spoke of caring about each other, helping each other, and cooperating in class; they say they learn best under such circumstances – this is "what we teach at Dickinson," a teacher explained
- Students also expressed warmth and caring in their interactions with students in other classes and grades
- All students consider themselves to be good students and feel good about themselves
- Students in the upper grades feel they can make changes, and have some power and control over themselves
- Students feel teachers genuinely care about them and feel supported by good relationships with teachers and the principal

- Students think it's important to learn and achieve; they are positive about homework and see value in it
- Students are socially conscious and idealistic; they want to make change, and see themselves as being able to make a difference in terms of violence, pollution, and caring for self and others

It should be noted again that the findings reported here are based on two factors: 1) what the students said, and 2) which of the students' responses the teachers paid attention to. The findings, then, have been shaped by two sets of perceptions: the students' views, and the faculty's views of the students' views.

Learnings About the Interview Process

With less sophistication, of course, but with enthusiasm, first graders and sixth graders alike can reflect on their school and classroom experiences and communicate their reactions. All speak candidly about teachers, classmates, administrators, and parents. The important learning is that younger children, like their older counterparts, can provide relevant, free-response data in an interview setting.

What is also clear is that younger children need shorter interview periods to accommodate their briefer attention span. Alternating interview with free choice art or creative activities was a useful format. A disadvantage of the process was the time demanded for interviewing on a one-to-one basis. This is a typical price to pay for substantive interviews and, in this case, was worth the cost in terms of the resulting data.

Interesting, and not surprising, all the teachers made efforts initially in the debriefing sessions to identify their students. Further, they found the information about the students to be in a few cases surprising, but in all cases valuable. They were pleased to gain new insights about their students and to confirm "old" understandings. They planned to use the data in considering changes in their classrooms. The principal, predictably, was more interested in the schoolwide patterns that he was generating from the themes specified by the teachers, and how they might influence change efforts across the school.

The upper grade teachers wanted to be confident that students were really saying what they thought and not what they thought an adult wanted to hear. They resolved this concern by reasoning: since students weren't talking to their teachers, the teachers felt the

students could be more open and candid. For future data collection, however, they recommended that asking students for specific examples related to their responses would verify their responses.

Data were obtained from a small sample of students, and teachers were interested in expanding the database. They discussed using university students as the interviewers to allow more Dickinson students to participate. School staff, however, had not observed the interview process (originally part of the plan) and were not experienced or informed about how to do it. Thus, who would prepare the university students for this assignment was an unresolved issue, and remained a good idea that was never employed.

Engaging teachers in reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting the raw responses was a sound strategy for several reasons. First, while researchers shared data without student names attached, there were so few students per grade that teachers were able to identify most of the students; and could contribute additional information to the analysis task, thus enhancing interpretation. Second, their review of the original information stimulated their immediate ownership in the data and the entire project. The data, and thus the interpretations, became theirs. This eliminated the possibility of rejecting interpretation had it been done by researchers alone. And, third, having immediate access to the "fresh" data makes it possible for the staff to act on data in a timely manner.

However, as in any research effort, the findings can be easily influenced by those who analyze and interpret the data – resulting perhaps in biased, inaccurate, missed, or ignored results. For example, an item of major interest to the researchers, but given scant attention by teachers, was the students' definition of "successful learner." At every grade level, students described successful learners as ones who are quiet, do their work, and don't disturb anyone. This definition reflects a passive learner and a norm of conformity, and was accompanied by the students' expressed reliance on the teacher for judgments of their work. Student responses indicate that teachers value students following directions and rules.

The issue for consideration is whether to use an additional set of interpreters who are more "distant" than the teachers and who might be more objective. A good deal of discretion and sensitivity would be required to employ such an additional procedure.

What Happened With Student Data

Plans were to share the data at the beginning of the upcoming school year with all faculty for their review, impressions, and development of implications for their practice. The researchers, who were well acquainted with the school, predicted one theme likely to garner attention and discussion: the students' definition of a successful learner. As this report was being produced, the principal was preparing for a year-long sabbatical. In the transition to an acting principal and the unknowns that accompany such a change, the student data report lost the time and attention of the staff. When that change in the school has been accommodated, it will be interesting to observe what happens to the student data. Will it regain staff attention? Only time will tell.

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Chapter 3

Research in the Hands of Students

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Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Setting the Stage

> A lot of students said ... what they would not say to teachers. (The students) were anonymous, and they were audiotaped, not videotaped. There was no need to say who was saying what, so it was very non-threatening. We got really honest answers because there wasn't any reason for the students not to be honest.
>
> ---Student researcher at Royal High School

Like many secondary schools around the country, Royal High School is restructuring to foster a commitment to lifelong learning. Here, as elsewhere, restructuring translates into a lot of staff work. The school faces the challenges of digesting complex state mandates, making effective use of the research, and creating innovative programs on a shoestring, all while holding on to the best of its existing educational system. The school's programs need to be modified while the engine is running and the budget is being trimmed. All of this demands that staff solve problems together. The paradox at Royal is that while staff collaborates well with each other in the name of the students, there is virtually no collaboration with the students in the name of the restructuring. This case study was a first attempt to address the issue of student involvement in Royal's reform work.

Staff are at times frustrated when the impact of Royal's restructuring is questioned. The results of all the work remain unclear. Staff, who spend most of their career in one classroom (their own), have minimal information about the success of new programs. They ask, "Does all our committee work have an impact in the classroom?" "Does this restructuring make fundamental changes in the learning process?"
In contrast, students have a much richer perspective, and are in an ideal position to provide information about learning. Yet they have not been asked. Students can express

their needs and the ways in which they best learn, two critical considerations in education restructuring.

Gaining insights about students' views of learning was the motivation behind the case studies in this collection. This case study differs from the others in some important ways. At Royal, students became the driving force in the data collection and analyses. Students conceived the methods used and led the data collection work. As a result, the student perspective lies at the foundation of this case study. For the eight Royal students who collected and analyzed the data, the research work became a participatory learning experience. Our collaborative group of researchers from across the country heard these findings directly from the students.

The Royal students who presented their findings to the professional researchers represented what is best about this school's young adults. They were articulate, straightforward, and usually polite. At times they were also clearly impatient with our slow pace. They arrived at the group meetings in baggy attire and with a casual air of indifference. Once engaged in a discussion that interested them, however, they expressed clear opinions and viewpoints. Since conducting this research, these students have moved on to other pursuits. We have tried to capture the flavor of their work in this case study. Wherever possible, we use their words to reconstruct their experiences and tell the story of their school and their research.

Context

Royal High is in Bear Valley, a city of 50,000 located in an area rich in agricultural offerings and tourist attractions. The city is surrounded by apple and pear orchards, which have provided a longtime economic base. In recent years, Bear Valley has built on its tourist potential. Outdoor activities abound – hunting, fishing, river rafting, backpacking, and skiing among them. A national park is within an easy day's drive, and a restored mining village is nearby.

Bear Valley has spread along the major north-south interstate highway. A growing economy has meant that the city has changed steadily in the past 20 years. With

increasing prosperity, Bear Valley has experienced population growth, including the influx of growing numbers of ethnic minorities.

Each of the city's two high schools has also grown. Royal High now serves about 1,600 students from economically diverse family backgrounds. Historically, the student population had been almost exclusively white, but that is starting to change. The regional growth has provided occasional construction "booms" which seem to be related to the school's high student mobility rate. The school also has a large number of students enrolled in basic (i.e., non-advanced) courses.

What Is Changing (And What Remains the Same)

Royal High School's growing pains are not always visible behind the traditional facade of the school building. Adults are lulled into believing that the high school experience today is much the same as when they were in school. After all, Royal's two-story brick building looks the same as it did when these adults attended the school. The students still complain about homework and the unfairness of certain teachers. They cram for tests and they talk about the social scene and that upcoming game with their cross-town rivals. Yet the social fabric of this community is starting to show early signs of distress. There are now homeless teenagers, designer drugs, and reports of gangs wielding guns.

In addition, the school staff is striving to create cutting edge educational programs. They want to provide students with the skills needed in twenty-first century jobs. The difficulty of these challenges can leave the staff feeling confused, distracted, and even cynical. Despite a variety of reform efforts, new problems still surface and old ones continue to exist.

In 1992, Royal High School adopted a mission statement that calls upon staff to "build resourceful, respectful, academically strong individuals." A banner with that pledge greets students as they walk into the building.

The principal at Royal has supported restructuring efforts. He selected staff comfortable with innovation and risk-taking, and has encouraged efforts to engage students in hands-on, experiential learning.

The school has also initiated an improvement effort guided by Onward to Excellence (OTE), a two-year training process developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL). OTE assists schools in creating an improvement process guided by a leadership team of teachers, administrators, and community members. OTE is built on site-based decision-making, goal setting, and implementation of improvement processes. Royal staff started their OTE training in the fall of 1990. Through the OTE process, Royal has 1) prepared detailed school profiles that include data on student achievement, student attendance, and parental and student views of the school; and 2) selected specific student learning goals by analyzing their profile data. The leadership team also conducted a schoolwide survey of students in which students revealed dissatisfaction with staff attitudes and assistance. These findings contributed to the development of a schoolwide improvement goal in 1992. "Staff committed themselves to teach students to use appropriate study skills and learning techniques ... to achieve a standard of achievement."

Royal's interest in achieving its OTE goal led to staff consideration of a shift from class periods to a block schedule. Staff argued that longer class periods would enable teachers to incorporate more real-world experiences into their class and facilitate performance assessment. Royal wanted to implement block scheduling at the beginning of the 1993-94 school year. Instead, the district requested that Royal postpone its move to block scheduling. The delay was disconcerting and frustrating for the Royal site council.

Timing of the Student Research Project

The student research project, which took place in the fall of 1993, came on the heels of the unsuccessful attempt to shift to block scheduling. Many staff members were disenchanted with the delay in their restructuring efforts. In a small but important way, the student research project helped Royal to think anew about reform-oriented activities. At the same time, it gave staff an opportunity to listen carefully to what students had to say about their learning. The project, in effect, clarified for staff the real purpose of restructuring: students and their learning.

Working With Students

The champion for the student project was Royal's assistant principal. After attending one of the restructuring collaborative meetings she asked a NWREL staff member to discuss the research project with students. With her encouragement, the Royal project was conceived as a student research effort. It also became part of a year long project for a class on leadership. Eight student researchers from the leadership class – two each from grades nine to 12 – volunteered for the project. Under the guidance of the teacher and the assistant principal, students completed their work in one school year.

At the first meeting with students, NWREL staff introduced the eight interview questions developed by the Restructuring Collaborative. Staff encouraged students to develop a research approach that would engage Royal's students in issues of local concern. The student researchers revised the questions so they were more in the voice of students. The revisions gave students a sense of ownership and control over the research rather than feeling like passive data gathers for an external study of their school. After that first meeting, the student researchers controlled the study design and made other decisions about how to conduct the study. For example, they decided,to audiotape sessions and to conduct interviews in focus group format. After some heated discussion about ways to reach out to all students, they generated a plan to collect data from about 200 of the school's 1,600 students. Twenty-seven classes were chosen for the study. The classes represent a cross-section of curricular areas, ability levels, and grade levels. From these 27 classes, students randomly selected five to seven students for a total of 159 participants. In addition, two classes asked if all of their students could participate, resulting in an initial sample of just over 200 students. From this initial sample, 150 students participated in the focus group discussions in November 1993.

For the data collection, small groups of five to seven students from each class in the sample discussed the questions. This approach was chosen in preference to formal one-on-one interviews. The focus group format, along with follow-up probes, resulted in rich answers and a formidable analysis task for the student researchers. However, there were problems with the audiotaping and many of the interviews were only partially

intelligible. This resulted in a thematic analysis of the available interview transcripts (supplemented by what the student interviewers could recall from the lost transcripts) rather than a systematic coding of complete transcripts. The student researchers, working with faculty coordinators, extracted major themes and trends from the student responses. They compiled the results and produced summary findings under each of the eight interview questions.

What We Learned From Students

Students defined success in school in a number of ways, but a strong theme throughout was students' diligence and balance. Students saw the importance of motivation, good study habits, a balance between school and work, involvement in school life, being organized, and simply putting forth the effort to succeed. In some of these comments, there was a sense that learning is more a matter of student will than what teachers or schools do. Below are some representative comments from students in a chemistry class:

> I think a successful student is one who puts in more hours after school than just during school time, and puts in a lot of effort into it, and just basically extra time into every school related thing they do.
>
> I think to be successful, you must try your best, persevere at things that aren't going too well, and never give up. That's important.
>
> I think you have to be disciplined and self-motivated because no one is going to motivate you. I mean it doesn't matter whether you have a good teacher or not.

These responses are similar to what students in a study skills class said. In that class, one student said that a successful student is one "with a good attitude, determination, hard work, people supporting you." Another basic level student defined a good student as one who "is happy with his work in school and he pleases himself."

Students were also asked to comment about their learning inside and outside of school. While about half of the students felt that they "learned well" in school, 149 of 150 students believed that they learned better outside of school. Learning inside school was sometimes criticized as being controlled by others and situation-dependent. In one

student's words: "Hardly any percentage of kids really learn with, like a desk and the teacher standing there spitting out stupid information that no one really cares about." Students often said that how much they learned in school depended on the subject or the teacher. Learning outside of school, on the other hand, was seen as empowering and energizing. Outside the school setting, students reported that they "chose what they wanted to learn," "had reasons for wanting to learn," "worked at their own pace," or "dealt with real-life experiences."

There is a stark contrast here. Inside school, students view learning as working, following directions, and pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. Outside of school, though, students see learning as being self-directed, worthwhile, and lot more fun and meaningful.

During their focus groups, students were also asked how they learned best. Here, the answers reinforced student feelings about the differences between learning inside and outside of school. The dominant themes were learning through hands-on experiences, labs, and special projects; relating school to a job; and covering relevant subject matter. These same themes carried through when students described traits of effective teaching, including:

- Lessons that meet students' individual needs
- Strategies that make learning fun (videos, games, projects, and groups)
- Information presented so it is easy to understand
- Experiences that reflect the real world and that apply to students
- Hands-on work such as community surveys and interviews

Students also wanted teachers to be knowledgeable about what they are teaching, have a sense of humor, and care about what and who they are teaching. As one student expressed it:

> Like when a teacher puts their personality into teaching, not just keeping it straight from the book, but a different kind of teaching style, involving the students, making it more interesting.

Another student talked about the "perfect teacher" as:

> Energetic, funny, caring; treats you like their equal; not co-dependent, like a friend, not a dictator. Relaxed class with a little bit of structure, if the kids respect the teacher, but it should be like mutual respect for your class to work out.

Students wanted teachers who are human. "It helps me a lot when the teacher messes up sometime," one student in a basic class said. Teachers' attitudes also had an influence on learning. One student said he was more interested when teachers "don't have that superior attitude – like when they know they are in charge...I hate that."

Student perspectives on how the school was assisting their learning was sobering. Many students felt that their school was doing little to help them learn better. Those who did mention ways that the school could help, talked about more ties to the community, having the library and computer lab open for extended hours, and the opening of a new learning center at the school.

The lessons of this project occurred on two levels: what the students, staff, and parents learned from the data; and what we all learned about engaging student researchers in a topic that is relevant to them.

The data clearly show that these high school students want more experiential learning. What the interviewers heard from students time and again is that they want to learn through trial and error. They want the learning process to be guided by innovative teachers. They want respect from teachers, the opportunity to take risks and make their own mistakes, and knowledge they can use away from school. "Aren't these things that any human would want?" said one student researcher, "Doesn't everybody want respect and an awareness of their own individual interests and needs? Doesn't everybody want to be interested in what they're doing?"

Students want the school to become a more engaging, meaningful, and empowering learning environment. They want it to provide the rich, real-world learning that they reported experiencing outside of school. Student researchers said their classmates repeatedly said that their daily school work is often humdrum and routine. This may in part explain students' views of successful learning as being a matter of effort and willpower. If school is mostly boring, then the way to succeed is to try hard and plug away on things that lack relevance and excitement.

Perhaps some of the attitudes can be explained as adolescents speaking out against the school establishment. However, the pervasive sentiment that students are bored in school is hard to ignore. The data indicate that Royal's restructuring and improvement

efforts during the past six years have had little payoff for students. In the eyes of students, the OTE goal to "maximize real-world learning" has not been realized in the school.

This is not an indictment of the teachers or school, but it does underscore how people sitting in different places view restructuring. While staff may see their restructuring and improvement activities as positive steps, students are more critical consumers when it comes to the effects of restructuring on their daily school lives. The reform planning which is prevalent in this actively restructuring school has yet to penetrate the classroom or have a strong effect on how students learn.

This student-led research project represents the type of learning activity students say they need. Students had a chance to be self-reflective about school and about what their peers were saying. Student researchers felt they had become spokespersons for what their classmates want and expect from school. The students felt that their work could be repeated in other locations. When the student researchers reflected on the process, they remembered that their enthusiasm grew as the project became "their" work. They were more eager to participate once everyone understood that this would be their study: students would have some control over the methods and participate fully in the analysis and interpretation of the results. Surely this level of student interest and engagement would not have been achieved without empowering the students to take charge of the study. This research project represented the kind of learning experience that students wanted more of inside their school, but seemed to only find outside of school.

Student researchers reported that classmates participating in the focus groups also had a positive experience. They appreciated being asked their opinions on major school decisions that adults make on their behalf. They also were impressed that their fellow students were asking the questions.

Student researchers and staff also learned valuable lessons about conducting student research: the logistical difficulties of interviewing large numbers of students in focus groups, the importance of good equipment and careful planning when audiotaping interviews (including taking notes as a backup), and the time and effort needed to analyze large amounts of qualitative data. Participants also learned that it is important to select a balanced student research team to represent different points of view. As the assistant

principal coordinating the project noted, there is a tendency to select student leaders for this type of project. However, a good student research team should include students who may feel disenfranchised or alienated from school life. At Royal, researchers were selected from a broad-based leadership class of about 40 students which included a mix of student perspectives. A more conscious effort to include all voices and perspectives may broaden the data and engage more students.

What Happened With Student Data

One of the outcomes of the student research project was that a small group of student researchers became spokespersons for their classmates on what students want and expect from school. The data were shared with the school community through a number of forums, including an article in the student newspaper and presentations to the faculty, site council, and parents.

In general, the study was appreciated and well-received by all who heard the results. Most faculty members listened to the results, although some tended to dismiss the findings as being typical of "complaining students." Parents saw this project as a legitimate and serious forum for students to express their concerns about school. Some student researchers participated in a community work session to draft a set of core values and beliefs for the school. While not asked to make a formal presentation at this session, the student researchers participated in small group discussions and had the opportunity to bring the student findings into these deliberations. Finally, the student findings reaffirmed the school's belief in block scheduling when they were presented to the site council. The results confirmed that the traditional schedule and curriculum were not meeting the learning needs of most students, and that longer class periods were needed to both personalize learning and provide more opportunities for experiential learning.

The results of the student interviews were not particularly surprising to those who heard or read them. This could be attributed in part to the school's experience with OTE, which provided student profile data over a period of years. It is likely that some of the same messages present in the student interview data had already surfaced from OTE

student attitude surveys. OTE has also encouraged a school norm of using data in school decisions. As a result, staff does not feel threatened by negative data that indicate a need for improvement.

The study's essential findings seemed to confirm what both the students and adults already knew. The study's real benefit was giving students a legitimate voice in the school's continuing discussions about self-improvement. When asked how the results influenced school decisions, neither the assistant principal who coordinated the project nor one of the student researchers could point to a specific place and time where the data made a big difference. Yet, the data became part of the continuing conversation about restructuring the school schedule and curriculum. It also provided important student input as the school community discussed core values and beliefs. The interview data provided students access to these conversations as legitimate stakeholders who had mounted a serious and credible effort (despite any methodological shortcomings of the study) to understand and communicate the student point of view.

The real impact of this student research project will depend on whether the school continues to seek student views as it continues restructuring. One encouraging sign at Royal is the decision of a school research team to conduct student-to-student interviews as it studies the impact of the new block scheduling. Student-led research on learning can give students a voice in the change process rather than keeping them on the sidelines like mere spectators.

Chapter 4

Speaking with High School Students in the Southwest

Shirley M Hord
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Setting the Stage

What can happen when a new principal is assigned to a high school where large numbers of students are at risk, where the faculty's primary focus is on their own academic subject matter, and where teacher accountability for students' learning is modest? And, what if the principal came to this school from a strong elementary education background? More explicitly, what if the principal still believes in student-centered learning and the typical elementary school philosophy of developing and nurturing the whole student?

Two years after the new principal's arrival, senior students responded to the question, "What are teachers doing to help you learn?" There was a strong emphasis and frequency in students' responses that focused on the interpersonal aspects of teachers' actions. Representative responses were:

> They go out of their way to help us; they give pep talks and make us feel comfortable.
>
> They are there for the kids, they come down to our level and are like friends.

Working on changing attitudes of students, staff, and parents was a major thrust of this school's restructuring efforts. How attitudes and relationships have begun to shift and how we learn this through student voices is Juan Perez High School's story.

The School and Its Students

Juan Perez High School is spread over forty acres of land a stone's throw from the Mexican border. In this subtropical climate, the 2,500-2,800 students move easily between the 18 buildings that comprise the secondary school facility. However, lack of adequate space for classrooms is a problem. Two years ago, ten of 32 "portables" were

removed in anticipation of an enrollment decrease that did not occur. Residing in one of the poorest counties in the US, 98 percent of the student population is Hispanic and 80 percent are characterized as low income. The number of students varies throughout the school year, as students of migrant families move seasonally in and out.

History

For 18 years, Perez High School served students in ninth to twelfth grade. The district opened a ninth-grade center, leaving Perez a ten-to-12 grade campus. As the population continued to grow, a second high school was built. In the fall of 1991 the new high school opened and housed grades 11 and 12. The ninth-grade center became a middle school, and its principal moved with his faculty to Perez High School, which was now the district's nine-to-ten grade building.

This proved to be a difficult transition year at Perez. The school now had a familiar ninth-grade faculty. However, there was also an "inherited" faculty that did not have the option to move to the new high school. Many were bitter at being left behind. The following school year brought another difficult transition. The district changed from one high school located on two campuses to two separate and complete four-year high schools. Consequently, a significant number of faculty from both schools were transferred from one site to the other. Though some of the faculty were pleased with this move, others were not. The new school was seen as positive, while the old was viewed as not so desirable. The Perez student drop out rate was high and performance on state-mandated tests was low. Teacher morale at Perez was understandably poor.

Rather than feeling a sense of personal accountability for the high percentage of failure rates, many staff blamed the students. Students were skipping class, whiling away time in obscure areas between buildings or off campus. Teachers seemed to take little action to "own" the students or their behaviors. Fights among students were common, often made more dangerous because of gang influences, knives, and drugs. Not surprisingly, the high school had a bad reputation in the community. It seemed that bad news always found its way into the local press; good news seldom did.

The changes in the school's grade-level composition and reassignment of some teachers to the new building had a disruptive and destabilizing effect on relationships among the 160 professional and 60 other staff. In addition, the size of the campus and configuration of the buildings made communication and coordination difficult. These factors, in addition to overcrowding, resulted in a staff largely unacquainted with each other. Except for others in their academic departments and a few friends, teachers didn't know each other. Further, the faculty had little input into decisions and lacked a feeling of ownership of the school.

A New Principal for the Old School

A new principal was reassigned to Perez at the opening of the new high school and reorganization of the faculties. He had grown up, attended school and spent his entire professional career in the area. His previous experience in the district had been as a first-grade and then sixth-grade teacher, as principal of an elementary school of grades three to six, and as principal of the ninth-grade center.

His background in the student-centered elementary schools where the focus was on learners and learning in a caring-about-kids environment was a direct contrast with the high school. He was not bureaucratically minded to run the organization. Rather, his objective was to facilitate the holistic development of students. His entry into the high school was something of a culture shock.

He had taken for granted the elementary staffs' caring and priority attention on students. In the high school most staff were subject-centered and their major focus was on their academic area. The new principal assessed that the high school's mission and philosophy must change in order for the staff to create a more effective context that would support increased learning outcomes for students.

He decided that teachers needed to get to know each other and become unified. In addition, attitudes – of teachers, students, and parents – needed to change. In the words of the principal: "Creating caring and productive relationships was the place to start. The school must restructure itself to become a place where students wanted to be and a place that parents wanted to send their children, and to visit. All constituents of the school

community must come together." Changing philosophy and re-culturing the school would come before changing programs.

To model this new cooperative and collegial environment, the principal visited students' homes and talked with them and with their parents about problems and concerns. He provided rewards (buttons and stickers) for students' positive and desirable behaviors. He communicated caring for the kids and for their appropriate conduct. He gained the commitment and help of an assistant principal, and after a successful proposal, in the fall of 1992 the school entered into the Partnership Schools Initiative (PSI), funded modestly by the state education department.

Participation in the PSI provided resources for leadership training for the involved principals, release time for professional development, and waivers of various state policies and regulations. With this support, the school's PSI plan was put into action in the fall of 1992. It focused on restructuring the relationships among staff, students, and parents. The goal was to increase mutual regard among all and heighten the expectations that each of the individuals had of themselves and each other. Three strategies were initiated:

1. Monthly staff development sessions to change *staff's* mindsets;
2. Retreats and Saturday workshops to improve *students'* attitudes and expectations; and
3. Classes and workshops to increase *parents'* understanding of their role in their children's learning.

Two school years after the vision of a new culture for the high school had been articulated and implementation of the three planned strategies was underway, an opportunity to gain information from students' perceptions about their experiences in school became available.

The Students' Views

As noted above, the goal of the high school's restructuring efforts was to change the relationships and the roles of its constituents. To that end, strategies had been designed and implemented to target change in staff, students, and parents of the school community. Gaining insights about how students viewed themselves as learners in the school as it was struggling to change represented an exciting possibility.

Working With Students

Twenty educators (students, teachers, administrators, and researchers) from across the US representing the Restructuring Collaborative were joined by four staff and two students from the high school. This group interviewed 28 seniors selected to be broadly representative of the school student body.

The students were interviewed individually or in groups of two or three. The 30-minute interviews focused on questions such as: What is a typical class at the high school like? What does it mean to succeed in school as well as outside school? How do students learn best? What are teachers doing and what should they be doing to help students learn? What is the school doing or should be doing to help students learn? During the 30-minute interviews, the interviewer took notes of the responses to all questions.

At the conclusion of the interviews, groups of interviewers reviewed responses to designated questions. They organized the responses into meaningful analytic categories and labeled the categories as codes. The categories were, in every set, not mutually exclusive in that some responses fit into more than one coded category.

What We Learned From Students

A summary of the responses from the 28 students follows. These have been organized into six areas that represent the students' responses to the questions noted earlier.

A Typical Class at the High School

It is not clear that there *is* a "typical" high school class; students reported quite different experiences. Their comments revealed variety in classroom activities, from classes where students took notes the whole class time (a single activity) to those classes that included some lecture, special projects, and group work (several activities within a class).

Another factor that differentiated classes was the *opportunity for interaction.* In some classes students did all their work individually, compared to others where there was abundant discussion, "lots of talking" about issues, or where students worked with one another on a common task. An additional factor was *teachers' willingness to help.* Students perceived some teachers as becoming upset when students asked questions in class "because seniors should know what they should do." Other teachers, though, "really care for students" and treat them as family.

Students also compared classes on the basis of teachers' use of textbooks. In some classes, students said everyone reads the book, does worksheets, and answers questions in the book. In other classes though, students described teachers who "teach life, not books" or who do not "go by the book."

In addition to commenting on how teachers design their classes, students described their own behavior in some classes where "students cheat" or the class is in "total chaos." In other classes, students are rarely tardy, pay attention, and feel comfortable.

Teachers may wish to consider the effects of these classroom variations on students' motivation and opportunities for learning. If every student experiences classes in which teachers resent their questions, or students behave inappropriately, or there is little variation and consequently much tedium in the instructional routines, what impact does this have on students? Do students also have opportunities to be involved in engaging activities and to participate in instruction that accommodates their particular learning style and preferences? How does the staff ensure that students' class schedules will afford them bountiful opportunities for quality learning in rich environments enabling them to become successful learners?

Student Success In and Out of School

All 28 of the students who were interviewed judged themselves to be successful in school. Their responses that described school success were organized into three broad categories (Table 4.1) that indicated an orientation toward: 1) Rules and expectations, 2) Reward, and 3) Future. These data are particularly interesting when compared with the "success out of school" responses where 24 of the 28 students said they felt effective in

their out-of-school activities. Four students conditioned their responses indicating that they were successful on some out-of-school occasions while at other times they were not.

These responses were categorized into five broad themes summarized in Table 4.2. The students repeatedly defined their out-of-school success in terms of relational issues: either they were successful because they knew how to work with or *get along with people*, or because they were able to *take advantage of their surrounding environment*. Other students knew they were successful because of *feedback* that was provided to them.

In a fourth category, the students focused on their *ability to apply* what they had learned in one situation to others. A final category indicating success out-of-school, students valued the opportunity to make choices, not always easy ones, about what they will or will not do (Table 4.2).

This analysis of the success out-of-school data revealed three trends. First was the overwhelmingly positive response to the question. The analyzers wondered if this might be a function of the kind of students being interviewed; were these the more successful students? School staff assured that the 28 students represented the full range of students attending the school, except that they were all seniors. A second trend was the multiple categories of responses, indicating that students define success outside of school in very different ways. Finally, the students did not emphasize one category more than another; each category had an equal proportion of student examples.

Table 4.1

Student Success in School

Rules and Expectations	Reward	Future
• I am not involved in trouble or fights. I know (have figured out) what I need to do to get a good education • I am motivated internally, by teachers, and by parents to reach goals	• I study a lot and do my homework • I know how to get others to help me when I need it • I get good grades, earn credits, reach goals, graduate	• I am committed to post-secondary education (post high school), get enrolled • I appreciate education; I can use it to make a new life • I understand the real world, apply school information to the world

Table 4.2

Student Success Out of School

Relationships to People	Relationships to Environment	Feedback	Application	Choice
• Get help from others • Contribute to strong family and friendship bonds • Relate to different ages and types of people • Study with friends	• Experience less pressure • Become aware of what's around • Survive the streets • Learn what I want, at my own pace	• Receive compliments • Get job promotions • Make money • Receive acknowledgment of skills	• Apply in-school learning • Learn to make good decisions • Learn what I want, at my own pace • Read a lot • Learn discipline on the job	• Are interested in non-academic activities • Don't cruise and party, rather fish and enjoy nature

How Students Learn Best

The group analyzing the responses to this question initially organized the data in three categories: what teachers do to help students learn best, what the students do themselves, and what other students do to contribute to the best learning of each individual student. It became apparent on further review that the third category contained only a few responses and, that they fit logically into the first two categories. Table 4.3 summarizes student responses in the remaining two categories. "What teachers do" refers to students' identification of teacher activities that meet student needs. "What I do" reflects how students address their own needs.

The data indicate that students learn differently, as seen in the wide range of student responses. An activity in which one student eagerly engages is approached by another with dread. While research confirms that these learning styles exist and that people learn differently, there are predictable patterns. Some students prefer to listen to the teacher. Others learn best by reading or working alone. Still others prefer working with peers. Some students want teachers to divide instruction into small steps and prefer to work on short, discrete tasks. Others prefer an overall explanation by the teacher accompanied by a few examples, and involvement in long-term projects.

Again, faculty may wish to consider the value of varying instruction and its effectiveness in reaching all students. Further, students may need constructive help in identifying the strategies that best help them to learn.

Table 4.3

How Students Learn Best

What Teachers Do	What I Do
• Demonstrate caring	• Interact with peers
• Act lively	• Associate with people who are challenging
• Are good speakers	• Challenge myself
• Allow open discussions	• Engage in hands-on activities
• Have interesting lectures	• Visualize, when I watch it done
• Share personal experiences (non-academic)	• Take notes
• Assign interesting homework	• Ask questions
• Allow for group work	• Work on projects
• Eliminate mysteries (surprises)	• Repeat and practice
• Provide visual examples	• Help others who help me
• Explain step-by-step	• Seek solitude to concentrate
• Make learning fun	

Teacher Actions and Student Learning

Two questions solicited student responses: What are your teachers doing to help you learn? What do you wish your teachers were doing to help you learn? Initially, two broad categories of responses emerged: academic – responses related to the teaching-learning process; and interpersonal – responses concerned with student-teacher relationships and a caring school climate. Two additional categories were created as the data were reviewed: motivation, what teachers do to encourage students; and applications, how students apply knowledge to the world outside of school and make the transition to adulthood (Tables 4.4 and 4.5).

One finding not expected in a large high school like Perez was the strong emphasis in the interpersonal category. This category had the most responses to the question of what teachers are doing to help students learn. This appears to reflect the faculty's two-year efforts to build strong teacher-student relationships and a caring climate.

The academic category, second in the number of responses, included a range of activities that teachers provide to help students learn. They included interesting real-world lessons, tutoring, helping with homework, to adding to and supplementing the textbook with other reading and lessons. These responses reflect the variety of student learning styles, and the need for variety in students' learning tasks. There is, as indicated, no "silver bullet" that will help all students learn.

The applications category reflects what appear to be seniors' natural concerns about the future as they prepare to graduate from high school. It would be interesting to ascertain if the views of seniors differ from students in other grade-levels. Faculty may consider interviewing freshmen and others, if they find this type of activity to be worthwhile.

Table 4.4

What Are Your Teachers Doing to Help You Learn?

Motivation	Applications	Academic	Interpersonal
• Say "yes you can do it"	• Provide vocational help (ideas)	• Do interesting, real-world lessons	• Go out of their way
• Encourage us to go beyond high school	• Help us prepare for "life out there"	• Tutor, help us make up work	• Give pep talks and influencing activities
• Relate personal experiences	• Help us to graduate, make choices after graduation	• Allow for extra credit work	• Command respect
• Encourage independent thinking	• Focus on current issues (NAFTA)	• Give time to do homework in class	• Make us feel comfortable, are there for the kids
		• Focus on current issues (NAFTA)	• Relate to us, come down to our level, are like friends
		• Contact parents if we're doing well or poorly	• Relate personal experiences
		• Add a little more to each chapter, tell about it	• Contact parents if doing poorly or well
		• Tutor whenever needed	

Table 4.5

What Do You Wish Your Teachers Were Doing to Help You Learn?

Motivation	Applications	Academic	Interpersonal
• Arrange parties, rewards • Provide pressure to learn • Establish higher standards	• Plan field trips, real-world time off campus	• Provide individual help • Design long-term projects • Establish higher standards • Explain better	• Give equal attention to seniors and freshmen • Provide individual help • Become more involved • Control disruptive students • Help us out

Finally, in reviewing the four categories, it appears that motivation and interpersonal responses are strongly related to each other. That is, encouraging and motivating students to succeed contributes to a caring climate. It also seems that applications and academics are related, in that students want academics that are related to real world issues of importance to them (e.g., NAFTA), and that will prepare them for life after high school.

The School's Actions and Student Learning

Students mentioned several categories in which the school was helping them to learn. First, adults in the building seemed *caring and understanding*. Here a couple of students noted that teachers took extra time before a weekend to caution the students about engaging in dangerous activities. Several other students said there were meetings with counselors who provided help to students who might otherwise be expelled from school.

Second, the school overall was notably *safer and more orderly* than it had been two years earlier. Students said the school had gotten rid of troublemakers and had worked hard on decreasing gang violence. They also noted that the general appearance of the school had become more attractive, underlining the reduction in vandalism.

Third, several students commented on a *togetherness* in the building among the faculty and students. They also mentioned this sense of unity in terms of connecting the community and the school through parent meetings, more parental involvement, "Community Day," etc. They observed that the motto "Together We Make A Difference," had substance rather than being a hollow slogan.

Finally, fewer students cited direct *academic* contributions the school was making to learning, but a few mentioned classes that prepared them to take the state graduation test, credit programs, and rewards related to grade point averages. Overall, student responses indicated that they felt comfortable in school and integrated into its daily life in a way that enabled them to focus on learning.

When asked what the school should be doing that was not currently being done, students expressed a sense of general satisfaction. Many of the students strained to

suggest areas for improvement, and most focused on reducing constraints: get rid of the dress code, maintain an open campus, provide fewer limitations. Students also expressed a desire for increased independence and accountability. Students frequently said, "It is up to us" and "The school babies us and provides too many excuses for us."

However, other students said the school needed to enforce rules more strictly and connect participation in extracurricular activities to grade point averages. Whereas some students seemed to think the school was restricting their independence, others worried about what might happen if students were allowed to act as they please.

Students also suggested an increased focus on "survival" or "real-world" skills in classes and assemblies, an apparent reflection that their public school careers were about to end and apprehension about whether they were ready to be on their own.

Interviewers' Assessments

The 28 students selected represented the diversity and various learning styles of seniors at Juan Perez High School. Further, these students, whether interviewed one-to-one or in small groups, were comfortable in the conversation. The interviewers judged that the students were generally forthright and candid in their responses, acting neither brashly nor with timidity or reticence. Their opinions can be accepted as valid representations of reality for them.

One must be cautious in generalizing results from a sample of only 28 seniors. However, the experiences of a small number of high school teachers and students provide a foundation for additional interviews and a broader sample of responses.

It is also worth mentioning that the interviewers were able to do their task with a modest amount of preparation. They reviewed printed copies of the interview questions, listened to a short (15-20 minute) description of the interview process, and clarified understanding in a ten-minute question and answer period.

What Happened With Student Data

The Faculty's Reactions

The Perez teachers and administrators who were involved have read the report of the students' responses. The principal shared the report with the full faculty during a day-long staff development session. In departmental units the faculty discussed the report and responded to several questions from the principal, including: How has your department changed in the past three years? What are some of your department's successes? How has your department helped students accomplish success? What are your department's plans for block scheduling? How will you expand the work of the department for next year?

The report affirmed teachers' efforts to improve relationships and attitudes among themselves and students. They were pleased to read about and identify the good things happening in their school, and to communicate further about the awards and high-quality accomplishments of many students.

Teachers are planning to expand the data base by involving more teachers and students in the collection of data from the school's sociology and psychology classes. They want to include all grade levels, including freshman in their interviews. They feel that it will not be difficult to prepare teachers and students to conduct the interviews. However, they said it may be more challenging to develop the skills required for analyzing and synthesizing the data.

Earlier Interviews Mirror Student Views

Staff of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) talked with staff members, parents, and students about their views of the school two weeks prior to the interviews. The SEDL researchers have been studying the restructuring process at Perez for three years. Responses to their interviews are similar to the data collected by the Restructuring Collaborative teams. Their comments included observations about how the school differs from two years previously: "We've developed a can-do attitude and there is hope," said one teacher. Another respondent

said teachers show they care about students in small but important ways. "We walk the halls and encourage kids to go to class; we check the bathrooms [for the same purpose]," she said. Another teacher said school is the one place where some kids are routinely nurtured. "It's important for us to be here for students in need; many come from a single-parent family and have no one to rely on. They don't get all the attention they need." Another teacher said that respect between teachers and students has improved in the last two years. "All the kids are good and we never lose respect for them;" he said. "They speak well of us and we speak well of them."

Things have changed considerably at Perez High School. Student behaviors are different; there are not so many fights. Student-teacher relationships have improved to the point that students can talk to teachers "about anything." If there are problems, teachers and students can talk to the principal; he listens. School administrators help to resolve problems.

Teachers are receptive to parents being in the school. Further, they feel they are in the process of discovering who the parents are and what they want of the school. The staff recognized their own needs and acknowledged that if their needs weren't met, they could not meet students' needs. Staff are talking to each other, getting to know each other, and enjoying it. They commented that they're trying to maintain Hispanic values and "show kids we care for them." They want to "make students feel more important."

There seems to be a common view expressed in the data from the two sets of interviews that the school is making good progress on its intended goals and its restructuring efforts. What the school is trying to do in an ever-changing environment requires a lot of work. As one teacher said, "Three thousand kids can keep you pretty busy."

Chapter 5

Middle School Reform From the Students' Perspective

Bruce Wilson
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Research for Better Schools

Setting the Stage

Our work with schools is guided by the conviction that tinkering at the edges of current school practice will not produce the kind of successful learners our nation will need to lead us into the 21st century. What is needed are schools willing to rethink the purpose and structure of education, the context in which it occurs, and the results that ensue. In short, a new way of doing business. But doing business differently is more than making changes for adults; it also means making changes for students. Students need to be able to see that a focus on student learning is top priority and that there is a connection between adult actions and the vision for a school. An important part of this picture is making sure that we listen to student views about their learning experiences. For reform to be truly effective it must also have the support of students. This case study is a chronological story of how two researchers have come to appreciate the importance of learning what students have to say about their day-to-day experiences. To illustrate this story we draw upon examples from a five-year working relationship with a rural middle school committed to a reform agenda designed to improve learning opportunities for all students.

This explicit attention to the student voice regarding school experiences has evolved from our ongoing experiences in this middle school. To illustrate this evolution we will highlight four distinct data collection activities over the course of our association with the school. We will summarize what we did and what we learned from each of these four activities. The four activities include: 1) interviews with adults associated with the reform initiative, 2) interviews with students about their learning experiences, 3) classroom observations followed immediately by interviews with students about their learning

experiences, and 4) two separate administrations of an open-ended survey of students' school experiences.

The middle school used to illustrate these activities is a rural site with a fairly stable population located in the Eastern United States. The student population is predominantly Caucasian, with only a small (15 percent) African American population. Most of the adults are employed locally either in agricultural, light industrial, or service industries.

The school serves children in grades six through eight with a student population of approximately 700. The school is located in the county seat, and has a suburban residential feel to its location. Nevertheless, the majority of its students are bused from small surrounding communities. This school has a recently completed addition that houses the newly added sixth grade. The older portion of the school is about 20 years old and is well maintained. Prior to the 1993 addition, the school served approximately 450 seventh and eighth graders.

This school was a fairly traditional middle school, embracing few elements of middle school reform until a new principal arrived in the late 1980s and began carefully reviewing with the staff data about the school's performance. What they learned from this review was a record of excessive office referrals for low ability and resource classes, wide disparity in grade distributions according to ability group placement, and significant statistical differences between high- and low-ability students on nearly half of the items of a standard school climate survey. Data also indicated a lack of staff involvement in decision-making processes related to the establishment of school goals, a lack of communication across content areas, and wide variations between teachers in grading, disciplinary, and instructional practices.

A decision was made to move away from homogeneous grouping by requiring each content area to devise a plan for either heterogeneous or flexible grouping. A school management team with open membership was formed to deal with issues raised by changes in grouping and to devise a plan to make the school more responsive to the identified needs of middle age learners. After a year of flexible grouping the staff also moved to an interdisciplinary teaming approach. Each team operates independently, is responsive to its own student data, is expected to be creative and innovative, and shares

with other teams their experiences through staff development opportunities. A school improvement team has replaced the management team with its charge being to develop annual goals and approve proposals set forth by various school committees.

In the middle of all this adult reform activity a major building project was imposed, shifting the student population from seventh and eighth grades to sixth through eighth grades. Over the summer of 1993 a very stable staff of 28 professionals grew to 50. By the autumn of 1995 only 13 professionals remained from the original staff who initiated many of these organizational and instructional changes. Within that change context we now introduce a set of activities to learn more about how students view the reform process.

Adult Interviews

In the spring of 1991 the two authors began a collaboration with several middle schools, their central offices, the state department of education, other service providers, and a national foundation to develop a model of early adolescent education that will facilitate learning for all students. The school described above is part of this collaborative. The collaboration was designed to provide an integrated and systemic approach to reform rather than implementing a new activity here or training a few teachers there. The expectation was that the partners would do business with one another differently to break the traditional model that allows substantial segments of the student population to fall by the wayside. We spent time talking to all the different role groups. In the interest of space, we will report findings from only one adult group – teachers. We use teacher data to illustrate how hard it is, even at one level, to assemble a coherent message of the reform intent that can then be translated into actions for students. Even though the focus of this case study is on the students' perspective, we believe it helps set the context for student comments by first hearing from adults.

Working With Teachers

Interviews were conducted with each of the school improvement team members in the school, as well as the building principal during the early part of the 1991-92 school year. We were interested in learning more about their own involvement with school reform, their assessment of what had changed in the school, whether they felt students would have perceived changes, and their views about the process. We also interviewed various state department staff who were involved with the initiative, either as direct service providers to the schools (i.e., a technical resource for the school improvement team) or as facilitators of policy actions at the state level. In addition, we observed the school improvement team as they planned for improvements and received training about their new roles. We also reviewed documents (reports, minutes, memos, and plans) that summarized the process. Field notes from the interviews, observations, and document reviews were transcribed into computer files for further analysis.

What We Learned from Teachers

What follows are the contrasting views of the reform from two teachers. We chose the literary device of a diary to convey the two teachers' perspectives. While teachers did not record their comments in diaries, the words are actually those spoken during interviews with them. These divergent views nicely capture some of the range of perspective voiced by adults.

Teacher 1

March 10, 1991

All I hope is that we never repeat a year all over again. If we just do what we did in the previous semester, then we become a stagnant school. The ideas that we didn't come up with first semester, we ought to try in the second one and see what makes a difference...does it have an effect on kids? Do I see kids who come back and say: 'Why did we stop that? That was fun!'

Teacher 2

March 10, 1991

There are so many things thrown out at this school, the proposed scheduling changes, etc. You never know if something works or not. It just pops up. There's never any preparation for it. I would be reluctant to say if something was working or not because there are always so many things going on.

May 23, 1991

The principal says things in such a way that you know you have to do it but he says it in such a way that you also know that it doesn't have to be perfect or even done right away. But over time we all end up doing it...but no one is burned out. There is a willingness to experiment ... sometimes because they have to.

May 23, 1991

You can say "I see flaws" in a plan when it's presented, but they say we're gonna do it anyway.

September 16, 1991

Change is scary. There are two kinds of teachers. There are classroom teachers who like structure and others like me who don't mind doing things differently. I'm more impulsive.

September 16, 1991

I feel my students are not getting the information they need because of so many schedules being used. The child that cannot deal with all of these abrupt changes...they're frustrated. Especially this age child, it's better for them to have some kind of anchor. I know that in the midst of change there has to be a lot of movement, but students can't handle it, and I don't have the stamina.

September 26, 1991

I want to see the kids put in charge of their learning instead of being receptacles. They should be doing more of the pulling out. The teacher is there only as a backup. Part of our learning is to find out how much kids can really do. Now kids in the lower levels don't do as well in this kind of setting, but only because it's not the kind of curriculum they usually encounter. If you're only one of two teachers exposing them to these opportunities, the result is poor. But I wouldn't give up.

September 26, 1991

I cannot explain what I do in the classroom now. I just get through the day...all for the sake of change. They're just putting a child right back with the frustration of sitting next to a gifted student instead of in a setting where the child can succeed best.

December 10, 1991

I love my team. Our kids are especially happy. There is lots of camaraderie and more trust I think now...in terms of trust of ideas.

December 10, 1991

I'm very disappointed with teaching. I feel like I have ruined my whole life. I was brought up when girls were secretaries, nurses, and teachers. I wish now that I had been more aggressive and tried something else.

For teachers, reform measures can facilitate trying out new ideas or disrupt well-seasoned and comfortable practices; provide professional growth opportunities or impose tedious regulations; engender exhilarating exchanges or instigate endless and enervating meetings; and liberate or hopelessly constrain. Most often, reform effects are somewhere in between. Teachers are neither the uniformly conservative, "keep things the way I was taught" obstacle to change that many policymakers identify nor are they the overwhelmingly eager to change for the sake of changing agitators about which the public frequently complains. Quite simply, it is naive and dangerously misleading to speak of "what teachers think" as if there is one voice to capture. Some of them will almost always resist, some of them will almost always jump at the chance to change, and some of them will cautiously explore new ideas before deciding what to do. None of the responses is by definition more productive or destructive; but all of the responses are unavoidably essential to understanding how reform ultimately affects students.

How flexible scheduling, interdisciplinary teaming, and heterogeneous grouping eventually affect students in this school will depend in large part on the lenses teachers use to view those changes and how teachers translate the ideas into classroom practice. In the instance above, both teachers were responding to the same stimulus with respect to rules governing how time is arranged and where students would be placed, but they undoubtedly approached implementation with very different beliefs about the efficacy of the changes with respect to their roles as teachers and the kinds of relationships they should have with students. It is not hard to imagine, then, the difference in practice that ensued, with one teacher eagerly anticipating positive results and the other apologizing for the harmful atmosphere to which less successful students were being subjected. The issue is not whether something related to the reforms will be implemented; both of the above teachers accommodated to the changes. The issue is how the changes actually look in the classroom and what their differential impacts on students will be. The point of these illustrative data are to note that reform cannot be understood without knowing the mix of beliefs and values into which initiatives are being inserted.

Teachers are the key adult figures in whether a systemic reform initiative will actually make a difference for kids. They are the ones who determine whether a school

reforms in a perfunctory, superficial manner or in a creative, truly "new way of doing business" manner. They determine whether the classroom is old wine in a new skin or an altogether different concoction. While being sensitive to the adult culture in schools may be necessary to enhance the prospects for meaningful change, it is far from sufficient. Even well thought out, planned, and financed reforms have faltered when the student perspective has been ignored. In the following three sections we offer our experience in learning what students have to say about their lives in a reform-minded school.

Student Interviews

Working With Students

As a logical next step to the adult interviews, we began gathering data directly from students about their school experiences to see if any of the adult changes were having an impact on students. Our first exploratory effort involved 30-minute, semi-structured open-ended interviews conducted with 16 students chosen at random by the school. We asked students to describe a typical day at school, what teachers value in students, what should be valued, what is supposed to happen to students to make them grow, what is a good student, what is a good teacher, and what is a good school. The students were selected to be representative of ability levels, race, and gender. These interviews were conducted during the winter of 1991-92. At the same time, we also conducted observations of 12 instructional lessons independent of the interviews. The hand-written notes from these interviews and observations were transcribed by the researchers into the computer for further analysis.

What We Learned from Students

To illustrate what we learned from this initial round of student interviews we highlight, in the students' own words, representative responses to two questions: the first focusing on what students believe teachers value, and the second addressing the issue of how students define being successful in school.

What do teachers value?

I guess students learning what they're trying to teach – students having fun so they can learn easier.

To get your work done on time. If you don't they have a "hissy fit," they really get on you.

That we try our hardest, put effort into projects, don't get into fights. So we can get good grades and go to college, and do more for yourself.

They are here to give us an education and we have to learn so much before they pass us to the next grade. They have a goal at the beginning of the year and they push you to it. They want you to get smart for the next year. You are not allowed to just sit back and do nothing.

Teachers want students to "make it out there" in the real world.

That they teach what they know to students so we can become better, knowing more information, and excel in school. They want students to like school. There wouldn't be any rowdy kids if they liked school. It's the same kids who are rowdy all the time – they make smart remarks. We should have a good time at school, it's not just a place for learning.

What's a good student?

A student who comes to school, tries their best, makes friends, works with everybody, doesn't mind who is in your group – one kid I didn't like was put in my group, now he's one of my best friends.

Willing to put effort into work, willing to do different things, like dissection work. Ready to do what the teacher wants, ready to learn.

Nice and polite to other people, don't start fights, walk away, willing to give up something for other people.

Being on task (on time for classes) and participates in class activities, gets good grades (no Ds or Es) on their report card, always follow directions and don't skip class.

A student who pays attention in class, knows the work, gets their work done on time, turns it in and tries their best. They set goals and reach them.

While it would be unrealistic to expect students to see striking changes in their classroom experiences as a result of adult changes, we felt it was important to establish a baseline from which to assess subsequent change. What we learned from listening to this small sample of students is that they view themselves as recipients of knowledge rather than actively participating in its production. While it is too much to expect dramatic manifestations of changes in how students view schooling, it is nevertheless important to highlight what their perception of their role in school is.

The important point is that the students' perceptions of their role should be considered as adults go about the business of altering their roles and relationships. As adults in a reform-minded school try to align their actions with a set of clear results for students, these same adults must continue to question whether the way the role of student is defined on a practical, day-to-day basis complements or contradicts the idealized vision for student learning. Thus, at some point, we would expect to see students reflect definitions of student success in their words and deeds, even if they cannot necessarily articulate that they are, in fact, embodying the particular vision that is guiding a school's operation (and that they had a hand in creating).

The evidence that we have from talking with students and seeing them interact with each other and their teachers suggests that there is a mismatch between the idealized adult image of a student as an active, co-constructor of knowledge and the reality of daily experience. Their descriptions depict the good student as being essentially subservient and subordinate, a reactor to stimuli provided by the teacher – good factory workers, in other words, with teachers as the front-line supervisors determining what work is to be done and what work is good work. Moreover, the students' descriptions of the form of their schooling is consistent with that of past generations of students. For example, even in the midst of flexible scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming, the students clearly see a time and place for every subject: "If it's second period, room 204, it must be math." So, despite the potential that longer time periods and close proximity of teachers expert in different subject matters holds for schools, whatever is going on looks to these students a lot like what has been going on in secondary education for years.

Students define the worth of their participation in school through the eyes of adults, which would indicate that students see themselves as relatively powerless actors in schools, not to mention in the hullabaloo about reform that is going on around them. This evidence suggests that the students hardly view themselves in the same way as the reform-oriented policymakers view the successful learner of the 21st century. While a concomitant of this image may be improved test scores, at the heart of most visions of student success is the transformation from a passive to an active role. No matter how much the adults are "reforming," corresponding changes in student-related rules, roles,

and relationships will have to take place for there to be true systemic reform. This means that students will have become "insiders" in the process rather than remaining "targets" of adult actions.

Student Interviews and Observations

From our experience interviewing students about their learning experiences in the abstract, we felt that an alternative strategy would need to be employed to overcome the problems of student answers being brief and not consistently reflective. Conversations with the school staff led us to the conclusion that if we could ground the interviews in some concrete experiences, then perhaps students would be more eloquent. Thus, we came upon the idea of observing classroom instruction and then immediately pulling students from the class and asking them to talk about their experiences.

Working With Students

During the next set of visits to the school, observations were conducted in six classrooms and subsequent interviews were conducted with four students from each class, for a total of 24 student interviews. These data were collected in the late fall and early winter of the 1992-93 school year. The observations were typically of a complete lesson (approximately one hour in duration). Students selected for interviews were selected by the researchers based primarily on the nature of their interactions with the teacher and with other students or with their perceived level of engagement during instruction. A balance was attempted between selecting students who were actively engaged and those who were not. A secondary consideration during selection was gender and racial representation. Extensive scripting was done during both the observations and interviews. These scripts were then later entered into the computer for further analysis.

What We Learned from Students

To illustrate the kinds of things students had to say, we highlight two themes. These themes were chosen because they help illustrate the effort of the school to more

actively engage students in the learning process. The first has to do with the value student perceive from working in groups and the second relates to the sense of empowerment students feel at the school.

The Value of Alternative Working Arrangements. In several of the classes students spent time working in groups or pairs. In some cases these were highly structured cooperative learning activities, while in others they were more informally organized sharing arrangements. Students were eloquent in discussing the value of groups, and this became a significant theme of the interviews. The majority of the students interviewed attested to their belief that working with other students enhanced their learning, and that while there were times when they felt working alone was appropriate (i.e., they could "go at your own pace"), they "prefer working together." When asked how groups facilitated learning, students were able to offer an insightful analysis. For example, students explained:

> You can learn more because you can talk it out.
>
> It's better when we can discuss it and all put it together... it helps you remember.
>
> It sticks in your mind more [when you're in groups] than if we just study the assignment out of the book.
>
> [In groups] the people around you can help you and make sure you do it.
>
> I like it when we work in groups. When we work together, if you're stuck on a problem, there is someone else who can help you see if you have the answer. You can see how someone else did it and you learn from the help.

Students also discussed the value of working in groups in terms of social learning, describing how having to complete a task together created the opportunity to gain an understanding of others and of themselves:

> [Group work] it helps us get along better because we're around each other more. We learn how they [others] think and I learn that I'm not so weird.
>
> If you don't do groups, you don't learn different points of view.
>
> You learn how different people feel. If you don't communicate with others, all you know is your point of view.

The positive outcome of social learning was also described:

> [Group work] helps us out, gets us to know each other better. That helps you to be nice to each other.

A student that had been observed as not having completed a homework assignment described the relationship between working in groups and learning social responsibility:

> It affects the group... so its important to have it [homework] because it helps you out, it helps you learn responsibility.

Finally, while they clearly enjoyed working in groups – "we can learn and have fun at the same time" -- students did not express that working in groups was "the easy way out" of individual accountability or achievement, but rather the easier way to learn, as noted by this student:

> They [the other students in the group] make you learn faster and exercise your mind. It's easier to understand stuff.

Student Empowerment. Another theme was the degree to which students felt able, capable, and empowered -- in terms of their ability to affect what happened in school and to understand their learning patterns. Who determines what activities occur in the classroom? "Teachers," say the students. Do students have any input into the activities that take place in the school as a whole? "No, not really," they say. These answers are the same ones that students at other schools give. And yet, at this school, there was an underlying sense that students, in fact, did determine their day-to-day fates to a degree. For example, one student claimed:

> Do you mean do we have power? We have lots. We have power in being able to speak up. Power in the right to do this or that. Power in the ability to go to the teacher and express ourselves. We have the power of understanding. I try to take advantage of it, using it as much as possible. For example, I wrote a letter to the principal about a rule that I thought was wrong... he takes time and reads our comments.

Another student provided a concrete example of how, in responding to what the adults do, the students can affect what happens subsequently. When asked if students made decisions about schoolwide matters, the student stated:

> Yes, with the dances. We determine if there will be another one by the way we behave at the first one.

So, students apparently did not feel controlled completely by external forces; instead, they felt there are parts for them to play in affecting their school lives.

While students acknowledged that they rarely overtly made decisions that determined what activities they participated in, either in their classrooms or in the school, they demonstrated an ability to reflect on themselves as learners. This capability should ultimately prove to be empowering in that students will be in a position to direct their own learning.

As an illustration, one student stated that a successful student "was able to sit down and learn; I'm determined," and then went on to supply a strategy for doing this, which was to concentrate on those topics that were difficult:

> I like the parts of speech best [in Language Arts] because I've never been good in English; I've always had a hard time.

This attitude contrasts greatly with the majority of students in other schools who named as favorite activities those that were easy for them.

This type of comment was complemented by those of other students who indicated an awareness of the pace at which they were able to understand different topics. The important point is that students seemed to grasp that learning is a process that they could influence. The path to becoming a lifelong learner most assuredly has this recognition at its beginning.

Student Open-Ended Surveys

The second round of interviews with students yielded richer data but was very labor intensive. Furthermore, both the school staff and the researchers were not convinced that we were capturing the full range of student experiences in the classroom. Thus, it was decided to survey all the students in the school. A first group of surveys was administered in the spring of 1993 with the seventh and eighth grade classes (n=433). A second group was completed the following spring with the newly added sixth grade class (n=264). Both surveys were similar in content with only small modifications in the latter group to reflect staff interest in learning more from students about the elementary to middle school transition and an elimination of questions that were not very helpful with the first group of students. Plans are under way to re-survey the same sixth grade sample at the end of the

eighth grade experiences in the spring of 1996 to determine whether their school experiences have changed their perspectives on learning.

Working With Students (Group 1: Seventh and Eighth Graders)

With the collaboration of staff at the middle school, we designed an open-ended student survey with questions that addressed issues of concern to both teachers and researchers (a complete copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B). The issues included questions about the students themselves, their school, their classroom experiences, their teachers, their views on learning, the classroom activities they engage in, and their parent/home role in school.

The survey, which included more than 100 questions, was open-ended; students were encouraged to write extensively. Indeed, most of the language arts staff saw this as a writing opportunity and used it as such during the last few weeks of school in 1993. Students did not complete the survey in one sitting, but worked on it during class time over the course of several days. Feedback sessions with staff the following fall convinced them of the significance of hearing student voices.

During of the summer of 1993, the research staff collaboratively coded the surveys from the initial survey administration. Four researchers worked together in the initial coding to insure that common definitions were being used. In this first round of coding, we decided to adhere as closely as possible to the students' words. In some cases there were as many as 60 or 70 codes for each question. Coded responses were entered into the computer for additional analysis. Using frequency distributions from the individual survey questions, a written report was prepared for the school. The report addressed three topics: 1) what being successful in school means and where students see themselves in terms of their definitions of success, 2) daily instructional routines and experiences, and 3) the kinds of support for learning available in school and home environments. In addition, follow-up visits were made to the schools to meet with teachers to dialogue about what they learned from the analysis.

What We Learned from Students (Group 1: Seventh and Eighth Graders)

To give the reader a flavor of the results, two of the more significant findings are highlighted below. The first distinguishes between students' definitions of success in school and their views of the types of people they would like to become in the future. The second highlights the importance of different learning styles by comparing what activities students said helped and did not help them learn in class.

Success in School and in the Future. One of the open-ended questions tapped students' perspectives on positive characteristics associated with school life while another asked about important attributes in the future. The first question asked students to complete the phrase "I am a successful student because ..." and the latter question asked them to respond to "The kind of person I would like to become is ..." Not surprisingly, students responded to the former question using an immediate, short-term frame of reference whereas they wrote about the latter in more future-oriented terms. However, what was surprising is that students viewed school as rewarding the attributes of compliance, making an effort, and getting good grades; whereas important future attributes included goal-setting ability, getting along with others, and acquiring personal traits such as being smart and healthy (see Table 5.1). The pattern of responses was almost the reverse for the two questions.

Table 5.1

Student Views of Success

	Immediate Behaviors: Compliance/ Effort/Grades	**Life-Long Attributes:** Goals/Relations/ Traits	Other	No. of Responses	No. of Students
I am a successful student because...	69%	22%	9%	930	433
The kind of person I would like to become is...	17%	80%	3%	533	411

Note: Students often responded with more than one answer to the question so that there are often more responses than respondents. This is particularly true of the successful student question.

The following are representative student comments about immediate behaviors:

> Good worker and listener, does all their work, and has good grades.
>
> [name of student] because she is quiet as a mouse and does all of her work.
>
> Doesn't talk, comes on time, and is prepared to do the work.
>
> Is a person who always does their work, who keeps their mind on what they are doing.
>
> Gets good grades, doesn't goof off, and always turns work in.

The life-long attributes category reflected a greater emphasis on relations with others (one who helps others), having clear goals (a specific vocation in mind), or positive personal attributes (happy, funny, smart):

> Intelligent in so many ways and responsible for the world.
>
> An understanding, giving, loving person.
>
> A caring, imaginative, helpful human being who likes to be around people.
>
> A nice person willing to lend a helping hand.
>
> Someone that everyone looks up to.
>
> Care about others and be able to talk to people who don't have other people to talk to them.

Thus, even in a reform-oriented school, what is reinforced is the traditional image of the passive student: one who gets good grades, does not get in trouble, and makes an effort.

This is even more surprising when compared with data from the teachers at the school who emphasize positive relational characteristics (e.g., "tolerance," "awareness of others," "cultural sensitivity," and "empathy") and indications of being responsible (e.g., "sets goals," "shows initiative," and "acts responsibly") as the kinds of results they want to see from successful students. The teachers" definitions of successful students are more consistent with the students" views of what they would like to become in the future. There are clear discrepancies between how students define success in school and how they feel they should act in the future. More importantly, students' views of success in school do not appear to be aligned with most reformers' perspectives on successful learning as an active, student-initiated, life-long process. Thus, these findings suggest that while adults are becoming increasingly engaged in innovative activities and want to see different results

from students than they have gotten in the past, reform has left the day-to-day experiences of most students unchanged.

Helpful/Unhelpful Activities. Another part of the survey asked students to describe activities that helped them learn in the classroom and activities that did not help them learn. Table 5.2 represents the frequency distributions for helpful and unhelpful activities. What is most striking about the two lists is that they are almost identical. Of the five most frequent helpful and unhelpful activities, four of the same activities appear on both lists. Indeed, the top three on both lists are the same, but just ranked in a slightly different order. Only one activity was unique to each column.

Table 5.2

Student Views of Classroom Activities

Helpful Activities	No. of Times Mentioned	Unhelpful Activities	No. of Times Mentioned
(1) Working with other students	107	(1) Worksheets	73
(2) Doing projects	77	(2) Doing projects	48
(3) Worksheets	62	(3) Working with other students	39
(4) Listening to the teacher	47	(4) Reading	30
(5) Working with the teacher	33	(5) Listening to the teacher	19

This illustrates in a compelling way that individuals learn differently. An activity that one student eagerly engages in is approached with dread by another. Research on learning styles takes this situation as a fact, not as a problem. It is simply the case that people learn differently. But we also know that there are predictable patterns. Some students would rather listen to the teacher or read to get information and work by themselves; other students would rather work with other people. Some students want teachers to break instruction down step by step and prefer to work on short, discrete tasks; others would rather have the teachers give an overall explanation with a few examples and engage in long-term projects. The message school staff took from these

data was that varied instruction is more likely to be effective than repetitious, narrowly focused instruction and that students will need constructive help building a bridge from the activities they prefer to the activities they do not.

Working With Students (Group 2: Sixth Graders)

In the 1993-94 school year, the school shifted from a seven-eight to a six-seven-eight grade configuration. The staff asked us to conduct a similar survey, with minor modifications made by the staff, with their new sixth grade class. These modifications included the addition of questions about the transition from elementary to middle school and the elimination of questions that were not very informative or helpful to the researchers or school staff from the first administration. Researchers and school staff also saw this as an opportunity to collect baseline data about the sixth graders' experiences, with plans to survey them again at the end of their eighth grade experience (spring 1996). We could then determine if students' perspectives on school had changed.

A procedure similar to that used with the first administration was initiated with this sixth grade cohort. Students completed the survey over the course of several days in the spring of 1994. During the summer researchers streamlined the initial coding scheme, reducing the number of codes to a more manageable set, and coded the data for entry into the computer. In the fall, an interactive feedback session was designed for the school staff to engage them in a dialogue about what the sixth graders had to say. Summary responses patterns for individual questions were organized around seven topics: 1) adult support, 2) school and the future, 3) student responsibility for learning, 4) special programs for students, 5) students' views of teachers, 6) classroom activities, and 7) students' definitions of success. We had teachers identify common themes within each topic, discuss any surprises they saw in the data, and identify what changes they would like to see in future student responses.

Analysis of individual questions revealed a number of interesting trends. But it was obvious from the teacher feedback session that some of them got lost in the thicket of individual responses. Thus, we wanted to build some quantitative indicators that cut across multiple questions and represented important themes to students. We began that

process by carefully reviewing the complete responses of a small sample (15 percent) of the students who identified themselves as "unsuccessful." Several themes were chosen not only because they emerged as important to "unsuccessful" students but also because we believe they may be sensitive to school reform and thus may change from the sixth grade responses in 1994 to these same students' eighth grade responses two years later. Results from two of these themes are highlighted below:

1. *Locus of control:* the extent to which students feel in control of their school experience as opposed to feeling controlled or acted on by external forces
2. *Experience match with student needs:* the extent of congruence between student self-defined needs and what they report experiencing in school

Empirical indicators were developed using multiple questions from the survey for both of these themes.

What We Learned from Students (Group 2: Sixth Graders)

The two themes of locus of control and the match/mismatch between classroom experiences and students' self-defined needs are summarized in the following sections by documenting how each empirical indicator was assembled and by describing the results. The intent in creating these empirical indicators is twofold. The first is to establish some meaningful baseline measures from entering sixth grade students which can be compared with those same students' responses at the end of their middle school careers. We highlight for the reader variation in responses across the sample and speculate about the direction of change we might expect to see from eighth graders at the end of their middle school experience. The second purpose is to illustrate that, even with open-ended qualitative responses to a diverse set of questions, interesting aggregate quantitative analyses can be performed.

Locus of Control Theme. This theme assesses the extent to which students feel in control of their own school experience, particularly their success in school, versus feeling acted on by external forces. Six questions are included in the development of the empirical indicator (the question numbers correspond to the questions on the survey found in Appendix B):

1) I am (am not) a successful student because...

2) I think I can change the kind of student I am because...

3) In my opinion a successful student is...

4) Things that I can do to help me be a successful student are...

8) What makes you not work in school?

31) Do you feel that good grades come from working hard or being smart?

Responses to each of these questions were coded according to whether students attributed control internally, externally, or neutrally. Multiple responses to an individual question were coded separately. Responses were coded as external if students:

- defined success as behavioral compliance,
- felt that they could not change the kind of student they were,
- said that when they didn't work in school it was because of the actions of teachers or other students, or
- felt that good grades come from being smart.

On the other hand, responses were coded as internal if students:

- defined success in terms of their own effort or learning,
- said that they could change the kind of student they were if they wanted to,
- reported that when they didn't work it was their own choice, or
- felt that good grades are a result of hard work.

An aggregate measure was constructed for locus of control by computing the percentage of each student's responses to this range of questions which indicated an internal attribution of control. Thus, a single score was generated for each student. Scores ranged anywhere on a continuum from 0 (no examples of internal attribution) to 1 (all responses associated with internal attribution). Table 5.3 summarizes some sample student quotes from surveys with low and high internal attribution.

Table 5.3

Student Quotes Comparing Low and High Internal Locus of Control

Low Internal Control	High Internal Control
I don't feel I can change myself in school.	You cannot just be smart, you have to work hard to be smart
I tried to change for four years but can't.	I study hard and work hard for what I have achieved.
Once I am one way it is hard for me to change.	A successful person is one who believes in himself/herself.
I will probably be this way all my life.	I try and don't give up.
I can't change the way I am	I feel that no matter how old you are you never know enough; there is always room for more.

Locus of Control Results. Table 5.4 shows the distribution of students according to what percentage of their responses were internally oriented. There is quite a range of variation in terms of the degree of internal control (mean=0.649, standard deviation=0.167).

Table 5.4

Percent of Internal Control

	0 - 25%	26 - 50%	51- 75%	76 - 100%
Sixth Graders (n = 264)	0.4	27.3	46.5	25.8

The focus of much of the middle school reform, both for the larger collaborative and the individual efforts of this school, address the issue of students taking more responsibility for their learning. Flexible scheduling, interdisciplinary teaming, and

heterogeneous grouping were all introduced to more actively engage students and encourage them to construct more meaningful learning experiences. School reform should cause students to feel more in control of their own school success. Therefore, if reform has been successful, as indicated by this theme, the distribution of this measure should shift upward (toward more internal control) when the survey is repeated.

Experience Match With Students' Needs Theme. The measures reported for this theme assess how self-reported needs and actual experiences match up for individual students. Three separate operational indicators were chosen that allow comparison between students' views of what should happen and what actually takes place: 1) the match between students own definitions of success and how they believe their teachers define it, 2) the match between the teaching behaviors students believe would help them learn and the teaching practices they experience, and 3) the match between classroom activities which students believed would help them learn and those they actually experienced.

The first measure looks for congruence on individual students' responses to the following questions about the meaning of success:

3) In my opinion a successful student is...

30) Describe the kind of learner the teacher of this class would say is successful.

Many students gave multiple responses to one or both of these questions. Students were coded as having a "match" if any of their own descriptions of success (#3) matched any of the descriptions they attributed to their teacher (#30).

The second measure looks for congruence in individual student's responses to the following questions about teaching behaviors (which cut across pedagogical activities).

5) Things that my teachers can help me do to be a successful student are...

37) The kind of teacher I learn best from is...

33) Something my teachers do a lot in their classrooms is...

Responses were counted as a match if the students had any response on the question about actual teacher behavior (#33) which matched any response to either of the two questions about desired teacher behavior (#5 and #37).

The third measure of school success in meeting student needs looks for congruence in responses to the following questions about classroom activities:

43) Describe classroom activities that help you learn.

52) Describe the kind of work you usually do in class.

On each of these questions, students described up to five classroom activities. The percentage of matching answers was calculated for each student. Table 5.5 contrasts a few students with high and low matches between activities that help them and activities they regularly encounter.

Table 5.5

Student Responses Comparing High and Low Matches on Helpful Activities and Usual Activities in the Classroom

	High Match	
	Helpful Activities	Activities We Do
Student 1	classwork homework	classwork boardwork work with overhead homework
Student 2	posters partners bookwork	bookwork posters dittos talking partners
Student 3	reports homework tests games	reports tests homework classwork

Table 5.5, continued

	Low Match	
	Helpful Activities	Activities We Do
Student 4	doing projects listening to teacher working with teacher	book involvement filmstrips just talking working in groups
Student 5	doing worksheets doing projects working with teacher working with students listening to teacher	taking notes taking tests drawing activities
Student 6	worksheets doing projects working with teacher working with other students listening to teacher	listening to directions asking questions working on our own reading in a class receiving and copying our homework

Results from Experience and Needs Match. Table 5.6 summarizes the percentage of students with matching needs and experiences across the three empirical indicators. The logic of this analysis is that as the match between needs and daily experience in the classroom grows, so too will learning. While this intuitively makes sense, it is an untested assumption. The evidence suggests that there is not a strong match, with fewer than half the students experiencing congruence between their own visions of success and those of teachers, or with classroom activities they felt helped them learn and those they experienced. The match with teaching behaviors was even lower; only 20 percent of students experienced congruence between the teaching behaviors they believed would help them learn and those they actually experienced in the classroom.

Table 5. 6

Percent of Students with Matching Needs and Experiences

	Images of Success	Teaching Behaviors	Classroom Activities
Sixth Graders	44.3 (n=221)	19.8 (n=252)	44.3 (n=231)

Students' definitions of success do not match those of the teacher. Combine that with the earlier finding that school success and important future attributes are defined differently by students, and it becomes obvious that there needs to be more dialogue both within and across role groups (including students) to build a more coherent vision for the kinds of results this reform initiative should promote.

Possible directions for reform can be gleaned by comparing the most common student answers to questions about desired and actual teaching practices. The four teaching practices which students in this sample felt would most help them focused on the relationship between teacher and student: attending to the student, maintaining a positive instructional tone, relating to the student, and making things clear. The four teaching practices which students reported they most frequently experienced had less to do with the teacher-student relationship than with the teacher as a deliverer of instructional material: acts like a teacher, monitors work, gives work, and disciplines.

Among this sample, students said that active learning activities such as projects, experiments, and labs are most useful in helping them learn. Such hands-on activities were the number one response by a large margin to the question about "classroom activities that help you learn." By contrast, when asked what kind of work they do in class, worksheets and other pencil-and-paper activities received almost three times as many mentions as the next answer.

One of the major tenets of school reform is to get away from a cookie cutter approach to learning and take the varying needs of students into account. Reform should make schools more successful in meeting the individually defined needs of students. If

such a vision for reform is successful, there should be an increase in the percentage of students with congruence between needs and experiences in the areas of definition of success, teaching practices, and classroom activities.

What Happened with Student Data

We have experimented with several different ways of collecting data from students about their daily experiences in school. We have also explored different organizational settings for the feedback of the data to the school including staff development days with the whole staff, after school faculty meetings, and regular team meetings. In addition, we have also tried different ways of presenting the information, from traditional didactics to a "Family Feud"-type game where teachers tried to guess the student responses. It is too early to tell which works best, but teachers seemed more enthusiastic about the more innovative and personalized approaches.

Much of this feedback provides background or baseline data for teachers, often a less exciting part of the puzzle. The value will be more evident when sixth grade students are surveyed again in the eighth grade to see if there are any discernible changes in their views about their schooling experiences.

Summary

We began this process by listening to teachers and we found that they view the reform process through different interpretive frames. We learned that without extensive adult conversations about students, these frames tend to act as filters, diverting the reform in different directions. This has the result of altering the substance of the dialogue and mediating the ultimate effects of adult behavior changes on students. Furthermore, such filtering prevents any coherent vision of what reform can accomplish for students – especially when the frames operate as implicit, unquestioned, "taken-for-granted" assumptions. This led us to want to know more about the student perspective regarding change. How do they view their learning experience? And what instructional activities

positively contribute to the experience? We learned several important lessons, both substantive and methodological, from listening to students.

From a substantive lens, the interview data taught us how perceptive and eloquent students are about their learning experiences. Even those who appeared to be unengaged could offer fairly explicit rationales for what teachers were attempting to accomplish. Students shared with us the value of different working arrangements and the significance of taking responsibility for their own learning. From the open-ended survey we learned that students talk in very different language when comparing positive attributes in the classroom and those needed for the future. Neither were they ambivalent about identifying a mismatch between what they do in the classroom and what they felt would help them most.

From a more methodological perspective, attempts with varied feedback strategies to school staff taught us that direct student quotes are more compelling to teachers than numerical summaries or researcher observations. Furthermore, we learned that both the interviews and open-ended survey protocols offer rich detail about students' perceptions of their learning experiences and the conditions that affect learning.

These findings go well beyond the traditional indicators of student outcomes (i.e., test scores) and hold significant potential for helping us grasp more fully what reform experience means to students. Continued efforts of this nature should help us understand the complex issue of why reform is or is not working for students rather than addressing the simpler question of whether reform is increasing achievement.

Chapter 6

What Students Think of Restructuring: Student Views of Systemic Reform in California

JoAnn Izu
Far West Laboratory

Setting the Stage

> This new system makes learning funner for us because we're having a good time doing it. One teacher noticed that we're doing more in a week than we usually do in a month. I really enjoy it and don't notice that time is flying so quickly. It's weird. I'm here at school until after school. The stubborn ones are still resisting. But the teachers don't give up on you here. So they'll probably come around.
>
> --Maria, senior, second year at school

> It's not working that well. We're with the same people the whole year and never get to see our friends. If you needed certain credits, before (in other schools) you go to that class. But this way, you can't get the credit that you need. You have to do things that you don't need. You can't just focus on what you need to graduate.
>
> --Sharon, senior, four months at school

> I like it, but it's hard to say (what other students think). I have a Spanish-speaking student in my group, and me and some of the other students try to work with him in Spanish. But it's hard to explain sometimes."
>
> --Susan, senior, two years at school commenting on how other students she knows like the new system

Policy makers, practitioners, and researchers would probably agree: The ultimate success of any school reform effort rests on improving student learning experiences and outcomes so that every student can succeed. However, it's rare that we take the time to systematically ask different students about the restructuring strategies being tried in their schools and how they work.

These three students' views illustrate different perspectives on the dramatic changes occurring in the continuation high school they attend – an alternative school for youth who are not succeeding in the regular high school programs in their district. Located in northern California, the school serves 220 students. About 40 percent of them are limited in their English language skills. The school has moved from individual teacher-

directed curriculum, where credit was earned for seat time, to more engaging and innovative instructional practices. The school now offers project-oriented, integrated thematic instruction taught by interdisciplinary teams to "families" or smaller groups of students. Students earn credit through cooperatively producing work projects, such as oral histories of their families migration to California.

This case study is about the experiences of students at ten schools participating in Every Student Succeeds (ESS), an initiative supported by the California department of education. Established in 1991, ESS created a network of 46 schools in ten districts to promote restructuring aimed at improving learning for students at risk of school failure. While there is no additional funding for participation in this initiative, schools share and learn from each other as participants in annual statewide network meetings. They also benefit from other district- and state-supported reform and technical assistance efforts.

The case also details the lessons Far West Laboratory researchers learned as we studied the schools' efforts over a three-year period and experimented with ways to include the student perspective in our work. Unlike many of the other cases described in this volume, capturing the student voice was neither the initial nor central focus of the research effort. Rather, including the student perspective was one component of a primarily qualitative, multi-year study that used a case study approach to examine what "rethinking business" meant for schools with diverse and academically at-risk students. Based on one-day visits to 23 schools, our research began as an exploratory, broad look at the themes in school restructuring in diverse student contexts. Later, we visited a smaller set of ten schools and conducted follow-up phone calls to examine how well they were meeting the needs of different groups of students, particularly limited-English proficient (LEP) students, as schools moved to meet the next reform challenge: curriculum-driven, systemic reform efforts. A student view of specific restructuring activities at each of these ten schools was among several indicators we used to document and evaluate the implementation of these efforts.

In this case study, we do not detail the experiences of students at each of the ten schools individually. Instead, we describe the findings and lessons learned across the schools. We also provide an overview of the demographic and restructuring contexts of

the schools. These contexts frame our findings about student experiences in school restructuring.

School Restructuring Contexts

These schools were not singled out as part of an elite set of vanguard restructuring schools. In fact, they represent a cross-section of K-12 public schools with increasingly diverse student populations. Each of the schools shares a commitment to "rethinking business" and to the notion that "all students can excel to their highest levels." These ten schools – one high, three middle and six elementary schools – represent a wide range of learning environments (Table 6.1). For example, of the ten schools, two are rural, five are suburban and three are urban schools. They range in size from 200 to over 1,700 students.

These schools also share some common characteristics. All have ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student populations. At each school, students of color comprise at least two-thirds of the student population. In addition, at least half of the students come from families in economic need (as indicated by percentage of students receiving free lunch).

In part, we selected these schools to take a more in-depth look at the emerging issues and common challenges in meeting the needs of every student when new organizational arrangements and instructional approaches are tried. Our early visits to 23 schools pointed to the language context – the concentration and number of different languages spoken by students – as key to certain implementation tensions and issues that arose. In selecting these ten schools, we tried to include a range of language contexts. Among these ten schools, LEP student populations range from 16 percent to 77 percent of the total; Spanish speakers comprise the majority of LEP students. Half of the schools have what we refer to as an English-dominant language context (LEP students comprise 40 percent or less of the total student population). Two schools had a Spanish-dominant language context (nearly all LEP students are Spanish speakers), while the other three schools had a mixed language context (one or two languages besides Spanish predominate among the LEP student population).

Table 6.1: Demographic Breakdown (1993-94 school year)

School	Location	Grades Served	Enrollment	Ethnicity					Limited English Proficient (LEP)		AFDC	Free Lunch
				White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	%	Languages		
Sanborn Elem.	North CA Rural	K - 5	758	2.4%	-	95.8%	0.7%	1.1%	76.5%	Spanish (99.5%)	29.6%	89.8%
Paramount Elem.	South CA Suburban	1 - 5	664	11.9%	3.6%	81.2%	0.5%	2.8%	40.6%	Spanish (97.8%)	21.7%	68.1%
Dos Palos Elem.	Central CA Rural	1 - 4	741	34.3%	9%	56%	0.7%	-	29.2%	Spanish	27.1%	74.5%
Glassbrook Elem.	North CA Urban	K - 3	436	19%	19.3%	49.8%	3.9%	8%	49.7%	Spanish (66.8%) Viet. (3.7%) Other (29.5%)	44.1%	92%
Riley Elem.	South CA Urban	K - 5	748	27.8%	14.4%	32.5%	23.5%	1.8%	47%	Spanish (50%) Hmong (50%)	35.3%	88.6%
Carver Elem.	South CA Suburban	K - 5	515	15%	20%	47%	16%	2%	52.2%	Spanish (66.9%) Viet. (11.2%) Other (21.9%)	55%	94%
Almeria Middle	South CA Suburban	6 - 8	1,361	26.5%	16.3%	53.6%	1.0%	2.6%	17%	Spanish	25%	50%
Fern Bacon Middle	North CA Urban	7 - 8	857	22.8%	20.7%	21.7%	32.1%	2.7%	29.1%	Spanish (50%) SE Asia (50%)	7%	69%
Carr Intermediate	South CA Suburban	6 - 8	1,790	1%	1.2%	92:2%	4.6%	1.0%	69%	Spanish (96.4%) Other (3.6%)	11.5%	66.9%
Renaissance High	North CA Suburban	9 - 12	220	29.5%	1.4%	67.7%	0.5%	0.9%	27.3%	Spanish	13.6%	49.1%

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Our earlier research showed that the same restructuring strategy could have different implications in these three contexts. For example, if a school reorganizes into "families," or schools within the school, it can anticipate different types of tensions based on:

- The nature of the families: Are LEP students heterogeneously grouped with mixed language abilities, or composed of a homogeneous family structure that places LEP students together to promote primary language instruction
- The number of major language groups and concentration of students in their groups in the school
- The type and level of staff resources to meet student' language needs

We wanted to take a closer look at the experiences of different groups of students to compare how well the same strategy might work in different contexts.

Restructuring Strategies Schools Tried

These ten schools tried myriad approaches to rethinking the way they do business, among them, reorganizing the teaching-learning process, instructional delivery and restructuring time. We found that when schools employed common strategies – or variations on similar themes – they created genuine opportunities for all students to learn. Table 6.2 shows the major restructuring strategies listed used in the ten schools.

Five categories of strategies capture most school efforts.

1. Regrouping Students and Teachers. All of the schools reorganized or grouped students and teachers differently. Half of the schools created smaller organizational units typically referred to as "families" or "houses." A family structure reorganizes students into groups so that the same students are supervised by a team of teachers and other staff members. The benefits of having the same adults responsible for fewer students over longer periods of times are twofold: it provides more personalized learning experiences and keeps better track of student progress. At the secondary level, this typically included teachers from different core subject areas.

Table 6.2: Major Restructuring Strategies Implemented in Ten Schools (as of Spring 1994)

School	Grouping Students and Teachers			Reorganize Time		Curriculum Enrichment		Schwide				
	Families	Teaming	Mixed Grouping Model	Year-round	Block or Staggered Schedules	Integrated Thematic Instruction	Meaning-Centered Curriculum	Alternative Assessments	School Governance	Prof'l Development	Learning Focused Prevention	Other
Sanborn Elem.	♦	♦				♦	Multicultural units					Bilingual/ Bicultural focus
Paramount Elem.		♦		♦					Teacher budgets		Behavioral Intervention teams	
Dos Palos Elem.	♦								Action teams			
Glassbrook Elem.			♦		♦	♦	Aligned Multicultural curr.	ELD Report Card				
Riley Elem.			♦		♦			Rubric based report card	Action & leadership teams		Problem-solving Teams	
Carver Elem.		♦	♦			♦	Learning Centers					
Almeria Middle		♦			♦	♦		Electronic portfolios		Strategic prof. dev.	Student Study teams	Technology
Fern Bacon Middle	♦					♦						Behavior based magnet
Carr Intermediate	♦	♦		♦		♦				Prof. Dev. School		Technology for LEP students
Renaissance High	♦	♦				♦	♦	Oral project presentations				Curr align w/ workplace standards

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Teaming – joint planning among interdisciplinary teams and team teaching – was another strategy used in combination with family structures. Finally, three elementary schools with mixed language contexts combined homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping of students. (This is referred to as "mixed grouping model" in Table 6.2 – see text box below).

Finding Equilibrium Among Grouping Strategies

One elementary school used this two-pronged approach for resolving tensions surrounding grouping strategies:

- In the morning, students receive thematic instruction in reading, language arts and social science in developmentally appropriate groups, based on language proficiencies to maximize learning for students at different stages of language skill development.
- In the afternoon, primary and upper grade students (including LEP and special education students) are organized into multi-age, heterogeneous groups for instruction in science, art, music, computers, drama, and career/self-awareness classes. These groups, together for at least one year, rotate through these subjects monthly.

2. Reorganizing Time. About half of the schools altered schedules and school calendars to provide more personalized or intensive learning experiences for students through year-round school schedules, block scheduling or staggered scheduling (i.e., schedules that allow a smaller number, usually half, of a normal classroom's students to be present for certain subjects and periods of the day). In addition, several schools altered their weekly schedules to provide more opportunities for reflection and other professional or school development activities.

3. Enriching Curriculum and Instruction. All schools also relied on enriched curriculum and tailored it to provide students a genuine opportunity to learn. Most schools, especially secondary schools, capitalized on team teaching to integrate subject matter and curriculum around core themes. Schools tried to make the curriculum more experiential, meaningful and relevant to student lives. This second theme, a "meaning centered" curriculum, played itself out in several ways. A couple of elementary schools

emphasized the development of a multicultural curriculum that better reflected the diverse backgrounds of students. Several schools incorporated more critical-thinking skills and emphasized the use of manipulatives. Still other schools used learning centers, special projects, cooperative learning, or other strategies to engage more students in learning.

In the high school we visited, staff viewed curriculum as a "vehicle for supporting" students. For example, one integrated thematic unit on immigration required students to interview their families about personal experiences as newcomers in this country. Both teachers and students reported that the curriculum was more meaning-centered, particularly by allowing students to choose subjects within a theme that were culturally relevant and that drew from their family and personal experiences. As one teacher explained: "We now know that whatever curriculum we use, we'll need kids to make a personal connection with it."

4. Developing Standards and Alternative Assessments. All schools also experimented with alternative assessments, though they did not always standardize their efforts across classrooms or grade levels. For example, seven schools experimented with or piloted portfolios as an assessment tool, however only one school used portfolios on a schoolwide basis and had developed a process for scoring them. Similarly, developing rubrics, especially in writing and math, was also a popular strategy. Typically, different grade levels or families set the standard.

In one middle school we visited, portfolios are used schoolwide to "provide the evidence of (student) achievement." In addition, student-led conferencing provides the "venue for sharing individual levels of (student) success." Electronic portfolios – videos and other multimedia products created by students – are used as evidence of their achievement in different subjects. Student-led conferences are held twice a year – first to set performance goals, and then to assess student progress. Students present their portfolios to older peers and parents to share evidence of achievement toward their performance goals.

5. Enabling Strategies. Schools also created new governance structures and provided ongoing, strategic professional development to move forward despite setbacks in their change efforts. Likewise, preventive strategies aimed at meeting the affective, social

or emotional needs of students that are directly tied to helping them learn appeared to hold promise. These approaches integrate, rather than fragment, staff time and efforts. The "student study team" was one popular strategy tried by several schools. In this model, teams of teachers, counselors, categorical specialists and others meet regularly to design and implement learning plans for students. This strategy – an extension of an approach used in programs for serving students with disabilities – is now used with other non-disabled students who are struggling in school (see text box below).

The Expanded Student Study Team (SST) Process

In an attempt to better assist students with general academic or behavioral difficulties, one school modified its Student Study Team process for special education students to create a "problem-solving team" for all students struggling in school. The Problem Solving Team includes parents and students in a meeting with teachers and other resources staff such as the counselor, nurse, special education teacher, and school psychologist. The child's strengths and weaknesses – from both their own and their parents' points of view – are considered alongside specialists' opinions and a review of a student's academic, emotional and health condition. As the principal said, "Teachers, parents and anybody else who works with the student are involved. Parents will say things like, "I didn't know that you watch them that closely and are so concerned.'"

Working With Students

We experimented with student interviews in the spring of 1992. It wasn't until the second phase of our work however, when we narrowed our sample to ten schools that we systematically interviewed students in all ten schools during three-day visits in 1993-94. We hoped the focus group interviews would help us to learn more about the school restructuring strategies and their impact on student experiences. We first asked students if restructuring activities – such as organization into families, integrated thematic projects, or extended blocks of time for instruction – helped them learn better. In addition, our interest in restructuring for diverse students helped frame further questions in two other areas: 1) curricular relevance, and 2) student opportunities to learn vis-à-vis different grouping strategies and more active learning. We also asked students questions in the following areas of common interest to the restructuring collaborative: 1) What it means to

be a successful learner, 2) How students learn best, 3) Who or what helps them learn better, and 4) Whether and why or why not their school was a "good" or enjoyable one. (A copy of the interview guide we used is presented in Appendix C).

We conducted classroom observations of students we interviewed for several reasons. First, observations provided evidence of the restructuring activities staff and administrators reported as important, and allowed us to compare these activities in different settings. Second, classroom and school observations provided a context for our questions that were concrete and specific for students. From prior, more informal interviews with students, we discovered that grounding our questions in specific classroom and school experience was important, especially for younger students, so they would better understand the topics and feel more comfortable in their responses.

At each school, we observed three to five classrooms for most of a lesson (between 30-50 minutes). With the teacher's assistance, we selected three to five students from each classroom for focus group interviews of 45-60 minutes. We tried to balance gender, ethnicity, and level of classroom engagement. When possible, we also included special need students. In a few schools, we conducted interviews in Spanish. At the end of some school visits, we experimented with ways of providing feedback to schools about information students had reported, as well as other information we had gathered.

What We Learned From Students: Common Experiences and Perspectives of Students

Instead of detailing student experiences at each school individually, we are reporting the common themes that emerge from looking across the data on the collaborative's four key questions. This approach provides us with a look at the similarities in student experiences across diverse restructuring contexts.

We found loose connections between student definitions of "successful learners" and the emerging new visions of school and learning among the school-community. Most students saw themselves as successful, and students at all grade levels defined success in traditional terms: getting good grades, doing the work assigned, and good classroom

behavior. One middle school student's response typified student responses at all levels: "I'm successful because I do the work that's assigned and I get good grades in all my classes."

The responses contradicted the emphasis that many schools had placed on developing new assessment practices and defining standards for students. Students expressed these traditional definitions even in schools with new assessment practices where being a self-directed learner, collaborative worker, and community contributor had been defined on a schoolwide basis.

These findings were also surprising in light of many teachers' definitions of success. Generally, teachers emphasized behavioral and affective dimensions of student success – academic confidence, motivation to learn, persistence in staying in school, and social behavior important to learning in addition to academic achievement. Teacher comments about definitions of student success in one elementary school with a mixed language context illustrate this point. In the words of one fifth-grade teacher: "It's their level of participation. They are there; they're getting their projects done. They can talk about their goals – what they want to accomplish before the end of school." A bilingual teacher of primary grades said success for her elementary students can be measured in "their willingness to participate, their self esteem, their oral language skills – especially in those areas where kids who don't speak the language are just beginning to be included."

The "value" of different learning styles was also evident in students' responses about how they learn best. Varied preferences for particular activities and approaches existed among students not only in the same school, but the same classroom. For example, cooperative learning was a common strategy used in most schools. Nearly all students understood the value of group work and enjoyed it. But some students felt working cooperatively really helped them to learn best, while others found working alone was most fruitful. For example, two middle school students in the same classroom had vastly different feelings about cooperative learning and how they learned best:

> I learn best in group activities. (WHY?) If I don't understand something, my friends can teach me what it is. Sometimes group work slows you down, but it's more fun to work with others.
>
> Giving an example or building a model helps me a lot. And working alone works best. It's a lot easier if you have a worksheet, because you don't remember most of the information. I can

concentrate more when I work alone. I get more done working by myself because working by myself is more together.

Closer analysis suggests that some of these responses reflect how cooperative learning activities were implemented. But the range of responses to this question across so many different contexts suggest that a variety of activities and perhaps some student choice are needed to engage every student in the learning process.

We also found that relationships were key in helping students learn. Nearly all students cited particular teachers, followed by friends, as the key resource and support for learning in school. A family member (parent, sibling, grandparent) was typically named as key in helping students learn outside of school. The importance of adults with the right attitude and time emerged as a strong, common theme to help students learn better. Students in an alternative high school said they like the school's system of project-based, hands-on curriculum taught by interdisciplinary teams of teachers: "There are more opportunities to learn," said one student. "We're closer to teachers and more like a family. I can talk to them easier than the teachers at (the other high school)." Another student agreed. "We're more like a family. These teachers pay more attention to you, they're willing to work with you one-on-one." Teachers who take time to get to know students on a personal level were especially helpful to these students. "I like the teachers here," said one. "They explain the assignment, they talk about feelings. They make (learning) fun." Added another student, "You get to know the teacher better so they help you better."

Interestingly, among middle school students, issues of respect and fairness emerged as key attributes among adults. Respecting students in class and "walking the talk" (e.g., following the same rules set for students) established a more mutually respectful environment for learning. In one middle school, a small group of students talked about having mixed feelings about the school. "Students can't eat on the playground or anywhere else except in the cafeteria. But the teachers are free to break the rules and eat wherever they want." Several other students cited this notion of fairness as well. "Yeah, and we aren't allowed to smoke on campus, but when Mr. __

comes back to class you know what he's been doing. If they can do it, we should be able to do it, too."

In addition to relationships, a safe school environment emerged as a key indicator of a good school. Students in elementary as well as middle and high schools often cited a safe environment as the reason their school was a good one. "This school is a good school because there aren't so many fights and it's not so scary playing outside," said one elementary student. "I wanted to come here because I thought it was safer," said a magnet middle school student. "Actually it's better than I expected it to be. The kids are nicer and not so mean." A high school student said his school had an undeserved bad reputation:

> This school has a bad reputation on the outside but it's a pretty good school. It's cleaning up; we had only three or four fights this year where as before there were fights almost every day. My brother and sister attend __ high school and they say they have fights over there daily. People from __ high school tell me, you go to THAT school? And I tell them, well at least I'm staying out of trouble and getting good grades, are you?

These findings coincide with teacher perceptions about what's important to student learning. In the eyes of those closest to the classroom, a stable and safe learning environment, as well as student behaviors that support such an environment, are a prerequisite to higher academic achievement. And for many schools in our sample, addressing the issues of violence and respect for diversity were an important part – and often first step – of their restructuring effort. One elementary teacher described her definition of student success and the evidence she saw of attaining that goal:

> Students are much more accepting of differences, abilities and race. At this school, you don't see as many problems as in other urban settings. Every teacher now knows kids at different grade levels, so students know they are accountable and responsible to more than one teacher. And they know they can talk to other teachers. This can be witnessed out on the playground and in the classroom; people of the same ethnicity do not necessarily hang out in their own little cliques. And one rarely hears racial slurs, although you used to before.

What We Learned About Capturing Student Voices

We learned several lessons from our experiments in asking students about their experiences in restructuring. Some of these lessons are about the insights that student

data gave us; others focus on what we've learned about the process of collecting student data.

Insights About Student Data

First, we learned that students, even at younger ages, are far more articulate and perceptive about curriculum, instruction, and their own personal learning than we thought. Students showed insight about the rationale underlying cooperative learning or different grouping strategies such as "families." For example, one third grader commented on why she liked the multi-age, heterogeneous groups for instruction in science, art, music and other subjects referred to as "rotations" in their school:

> I like the rotations. There are kids from all the other classes, so I get to make lots of new friends. And I like being the helper to Maria and Lupe. They're younger and don't speak English so well, so I help them in Spanish. The older ones usually help the younger ones with writing and spelling, but the younger ones help us with ideas and thinking.

Many students commented thoughtfully on the implementation process as well as the new restructuring activities. For example, students noted the stress and confusion among both teachers and students when reform strategies were being implemented:

> In the beginning, teachers didn't really know what they wanted, they were shaky. The bell schedules were all crazy and we didn't know where we were going, and they (teachers) didn't know where they were going. But now, teachers are getting the projects to where they almost know what they want. They don't seem so stressed now and they're more easy going.

We also learned that what's salient about restructuring activities can look quite different when seen from a student's view. For example one small high school reconfigured staff into four interdisciplinary teams. Students were then grouped into multi-age "families." Each family worked with a team for one quarter, then rotated to the next team. Families had different recess and lunch times. Teachers loved the approach, partly because it enabled them to get to know more students. Students, though, had mixed feelings. They feared getting "stuck in a dud family" or one in which they had no friends. Some students commented:

> It's not working that well. We're with the same people the whole year and you never get to see the other people and your friends.

> I like it better, because it's smaller and it's easier to pay attention.

It's all right, some of the projects are pretty good. But getting stuck in a group or project you don't like is not good because you can't transfer out. Where they put you is where you stay.

I like how it works. I've been here for three years. I used to go to class before because you needed credits. It used to be better because you could go to (only) the classes you needed. Now you have to do everything. But it's okay.

You have more time to do your work and it almost feels like you're in more of a group; you're closer together. Then again, this is a continuation school and you're here to get what (the credit) you need. And you can't get the specific classes you need to graduate. So it's a good thing, but it needs work.

This brings us to another lesson: We learned that students can provide compelling evidence, especially on difficult-to-measure learning outcomes. Students' personal reports on how their learning experiences have been affected by the school's restructuring efforts provide the evidence and validation that most school practitioners and parents find convincing. A sampling of student comments illustrates this point:

One teacher noticed that we're doing more in a week now than we used to do in a month. I really enjoy it and don't notice that time is flying so quickly.
---High school student

These projects help me learn more about what's relevant outside. The social service, or community service (component in projects) relates to us more. We go home, and we can relate to things on the streets and schools. What we're doing in this (environment) project — that's going to be history. So it's good to learn and relate to current issues, not just what happened in the past that you find in textbooks.
---Middle school student

What we're learning in math is the most interesting. Right now we're inventing a new number system to help us understand different base systems. We're developing a model to do it. I like it, but it's my hardest subject. It's a different way of learning than my other school. Instead of a textbook, we have to think and create the system. I want to be an engineer, and this way will help me use and remember math better.
---Middle school student

Moreover, because appropriate assessment strategies are just being developed, data from student interviews could provide evidence of difficult-to-assess behaviors. For example, student descriptions of the importance of self-reflection and assessment and their ability to now do so could complement the evidence that journals and learning logs might provide.

We also learned however, that most schools don't routinely hear from students in evaluating what they do. Many teachers requested feedback to learn more about what students thought. Rare was the school that incorporated mechanisms to capture the

student point of view in assessing restructuring. Time, staff reported, was one constraint in gathering this type of information. Some teachers also felt that outside interviewers would obtain better, or at least a broader range, of responses than ones they might obtain.

An important lesson we learned was the type of language context in which it may be most important to conduct interviews in another language. Capturing the range of student voices can be difficult – the experiences of linguistically and culturally diverse students, in particular. Like schools, we had limited resources and bilingual staff. As a result, we conducted student interviews in Spanish at only two schools where the concentration of Spanish speakers were greatest (i.e., in Spanish-dominant language contexts).

But we learned it was schools with smaller concentrations of LEP students or greater language diversity (e.g., English-dominant or mixed language contexts) that often did not consider, or had more difficulty, balancing new grouping strategies and other restructuring choices with instruction in the appropriate language. In general, we found Spanish-speaking student experiences in a Spanish-dominant context were fairly similar to those of English speaking students. Yet in many of the schools we visited, a far more diverse set of languages, other than English, were spoken among students. Because these students were sometimes either isolated from new restructuring efforts or integrated with insufficient support, their experiences could be quite different from those of Spanish-speaking students – and we weren't able to directly capture their voices. Therefore, targeting our resources at the appropriate groups of students – that is, at students where one thinks their experience may be different from others – is key if one wants the range of student perspectives.

Insights about Gathering Student Data

Finally, we learned valuable lessons about the process of gathering and using student experiences in restructuring. First, we learned that interviews with younger students were more labor-intensive than we could afford. Much can be gained from interviewing young students, however we found that students at the upper elementary

grade levels and higher could better address our questions in the 45-60 minutes we had allotted.

We also learned that older students were more likely to be influenced by their peers in focus group interviews, especially middle school students. It is critical that schools select students for focus groups who can create an atmosphere in which all students can be heard.

Finally, we learned that there is a need to address confidentiality up front. In one of our first visits, school staff were eager for feedback from students as part of their effort to assess what had been accomplished that year. As with all our interviews, we followed standard procedure regarding confidentiality. However it became clear that if we provided feedback to individual teachers, they would be able to identify students. We thus aggregated student responses in reports back to the school, which made the information less useful to individual teachers and their classrooms.

What Happened With Student Data

We experimented with a couple of ways of sharing what we learned from students with school staff. In most cases, we gave informal verbal reports at staff meetings or to principals at the end of our three-day visit. In a few instances, at the school's request, we drafted brief reports outlining student experiences.

Most school staff viewed student perceptions of restructuring activities as key to refining or altering their plans, but we are aware of only a few schools that used the data that way. In part, this may be because of the aggregated data we provided. To have a greater impact on classrooms, disaggregated data by classroom or relevant student sub-populations (e.g., language proficiency) might have been more helpful. In two schools staff used the information in two ways: 1) to help them assess what they accomplished during the year, and 2) in discussions about activities and practices they needed to change or improve for the next year. In this respect, the timing of the feedback was important to school use. Schools we visited in April or May were more likely to use the information than those visited in the fall or early spring. We suspect this is because most school

planning or evaluation efforts occurred at the end of the academic year or over the summer.

Perhaps the most profound influence has been on our own work and how we look at restructuring. We now routinely include student interviews as part of our research and evaluation of school programs and state reform initiatives. We continue to experiment with ways of reporting student data in meaningful ways in the reports we write. And we are begun to explore how student researchers can be used to design and collect information, to help assess the youth development programs in which they participate and to assist in interviewing students who language is other than English. We think students can be a powerful resource in systemic reform efforts, one that we plan to include in more of our efforts in the future.

Chapter 7

Northeast Educators Inquire: What Do Students Think about Learners and Learning?

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Setting the Stage

> I know I'm learning all the time because I feel something new coming into my mind.
> ---Third-grade student

Asking questions is a staple of the school routine: teachers do it all the time to ascertain whether students know information correctly. For many educators however, asking questions to learn what students are thinking is not at all familiar. Likewise, educators' professional development comes more through solutions presented by an external trainer or consultant than through strategically focused, collaborative inquiry. Finally, few schools and other educational organizations have routine mechanisms for listening to, and learning from, their students.

This case tells a story about the work of elementary and middle school teachers and principals in the Northeast who participated for more than three years in a regional network called the Assessment Working Party (AWP). Developed by the Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands (NEIRL), working parties are a school improvement and professional development strategy. They provide supportive learning environments for educators from partner schools affiliated with the laboratory[1]. Schools commit to work for at least one year on a topic central to moving forward toward meeting their goals for all students.

[1] Working parties are part of a larger change initiative of the Laboratory's called Designing Schools for Enhanced Learning (DSEL).

After their first year of working together, the members of the AWP found that their work on authentic assessment led them to ask questions about learning: What is learning really all about? What does it really mean to be a learner? After reviewing some of the recent research on learning, the educators explored connections between learning and assessment. Within the group, some teachers had already begun to assist their students in evaluating their own learning on a routine basis; others were just beginning to explore the differences between what is on youngsters' minds about their own learning and teachers' judgments of students' answers regarding curriculum material.

The research effort described in this case included overall design and analysis by the AWP that supported data collection by individual teachers in their classrooms and later, in a few schools, across classrooms. In some schools, asking students questions about their learning took place in the context of ongoing teacher assessment and student self-assessment so that it was indistinguishable from routine classroom operation. In other schools, it was a novel experience for teachers to ask children questions without preparing them first with the correct answers. As we will discuss later in the "overall learnings" section, an embedded approach turns research protocol a bit on its head. At the same time, it offers fewer of the barriers to use study findings that one encounters in research that is disconnected from the fabric of the use setting (see Watkins, 1994-1995).

The authors of this case are the two laboratory personnel who facilitated the working party[2]. We organize the case chronologically, following the AWP work on questioning students about learning over two years, 1993-1994. We emphasize, however, that the working party did not design the work as a multi-year study; rather, it evolved over time as participants followed the energy and pay-off of inquiring through action. First, we examine the work of the Assessment Working Party as a whole; then we look at individual members' activities back home in their schools; and finally, we follow a few schools in their endeavors to take the inquiry schoolwide. We conclude by reflecting on our learnings across all parts of the work.

It should be noted that most of the working party members, including NEIRL staff, knew more about curriculum, instruction, and conventional assessment than about learning

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[2] Pat Cox now works as an independent consultant and Jill Mirman Owen works part time at the laboratory.

when the work on authentic assessment began. The AWP, therefore, invited all of us to examine learning in order to rethink assessment. For many members, it became an authentic learning experience: It was not only about their work, it increasingly *was* their work to understand students' learning and how to know more about it. That is, the AWP gatherings evolved into collaborative inquiry sessions where members analyzed, reflected on, and recalibrated their work back home – it was professional development connected to classroom, school, and systemic redesign issues.

The Assessment Working Party: Network for Learning and Action

> The Assessment Working Party changed my whole way of teaching and looking at kids. It really had an incredible effect on me. [Howard] Gardner ['s writing] and other stuff made me question how I was doing things. I realized that if students were going to take charge of their own learning, I shouldn't be up at the front of the classroom talking. I should be setting things up so the kids can do their work and I work with them. And now I've got the portfolios which I refine every year and it gets better and better.
>
> ---AWP third-grade teacher

In establishing relationships with the partner schools in the DSEL network, the laboratory committed itself to joining with schools to learn, design, and make the changes that are part of systemic redesign. When partner school representatives met in November 1991, they decided that student assessment was among their top priorities. This resulted in the creation of the working party in early 1992. Nine partner schools from New York and New England formed the core of the working party. More schools joined over the next three years and participation in meetings ranged from 20 to 40 people. Representatives came from each school to make it easier for members to take what they learned back home for use in schoolwide redesign work.

By design, the working party was a heterogeneous group. Members (and their schools) were engaged at different stages with authentic learning, teaching, and assessing. Principals and teachers from kindergarten to middle school levels composed the group. They came from a mix of rural, suburban, and urban schools.

Working party members decided, as part of their focus on students, to ask the survey questions developed by the cross-laboratory collaborative. They also took part in analyzing the raw data, looking for patterns that formed hypotheses or questions to be

pursued, and discussing the implications of what they saw. Of the 20 schools in the working party in May 1993, over half had representatives who asked questions of their students.

The joint investigation that resulted from these discussions was not "pure" research focused on achieving uniform methodology across sites. Rather, a number of teachers agreed to listen to their students' thoughts about learning, capture what they had to say, then share and analyze the results. In some schools, this activity was the work of one or two teachers. In others, it was a constituent part of larger redesign efforts.

Two teachers from the working party helped design questions to ask students during a meeting of the Cross-Laboratory Collaborative group in May 1993. These questions included:

1. Do you consider yourself a successful learner in school? In what ways? Out of school? In what ways?
2. What does it mean to be a successful learner? How can you tell if someone is a successful learner?
3. How do you learn best? How do you know when you're learning?
4. What are teachers/the school doing to help you learn?
5. What do you wish teachers/the school were doing to help you learn?

The entire working party convened later that month. Participants discussed the questions, and members were enthusiastic about finding out what their students said. Some teachers were concerned that their students would not know the "right" answers. Other teachers said that the question-asking was aimed at hearing what students thought, what meaning they made of the questions (see Duckworth, 1987). The group debated about using the term "learner" (i.e. the survey questions ask about what it means to be a good learner), rather than "student," because teachers thought the word "learner" might be confusing. But after referring to research on what it takes to be a good student – neatness, punctuality, responsiveness to the teacher (Harvard Education Letter, 1991) – we decided to stick with the term "learner."

The exchange also touched on how to gather information from students. Members decided they would each determine the best way to approach their children and compare

notes afterward. By the end of the discussion, most members had decided to administer the survey to their students, but asked that laboratory staff send a letter detailing a protocol based on the discussion. Members were to send the raw data to the laboratory for processing during the summer.

Along with the letter listing survey questions, which was sent both to members who had attended the meeting and those who had not, laboratory facilitators prepared a summary form for teachers to record information about how they had gathered data and from whom. Among the questions asked were whether students had previously answered similar questions and whether self-assessment and reflection were routine activities.

The Individual Educator's Work Back Home

> I told [my students] I was trying to learn to be a better teacher and it was my turn to learn. I told them I was sincerely looking for new and better ways to teach that would help children learn.
> ---AWP fourth-grade teacher

Eight teachers from seven schools asked questions of their students before the end of the 1992-93 school year. At the first meeting of the following school year, October 1993, an additional 12 teachers brought data they had collected that fall. A total of 20 teachers from 12 elementary and middle schools in the working party collected data. The schools were from seven states in the region and included five urban schools, two suburban schools, and five rural schools (Table 7.1).

Working With Students: The Research Effort in the First Year

> [I can tell I am a successful learner] by following directions and answering, and raise your hand when you want to talk and don't talk when you don't raise your hand because that will be on your report card and probably you would get an F.
> ---Second-grade student

Teachers used a variety of formats to gather data including interviews, surveys (both prepared forms and student written), and video- and audiotapes. One fourth-grade teacher asked students to answer the survey questions in the form of a letter to the teacher

Table 7.1

The Number and Type of Schools Participating in the Student Inquiry Effort

School	Teachers	Students	Type
#1	1	19	urban
#2	1	7	urban
#3	2	38	suburban
#4	1	21	rural
#5	1	17	rural
#6	2	27	rural
#7	1	4	urban
#8	1	10	rural
#9	4	58	rural
#10	2	33	urban
#11	2	38	urban
#12	2	37	suburban
Totals	20	309	33% urban 24% suburban 43% rural

they would have next year. "[This was] wonderful," she reported. "I'd never asked students to write a letter to their next teacher. These also proved helpful to the new teacher in learning a little about each child."

Teachers collected data from 309 students, kindergarten through sixth grades. The eight educators who gathered information before the end of the school year sent their survey forms, audiotapes, and videotapes to the laboratory during the summer for processing. The process of gathering data prompted reflection for teachers, presaging the insights that resulted from the work of the whole group in October 1993. Here is a 2nd-3rd grade teacher's reflections on the data he collected and the process:

> [The student's] comments reflected (in most cases, not all) little perspective on the role of a teacher as a facilitator in a specific or broad sense – although some did, e.g., the girl who said she wanted a teacher to conference with her to help her select her next books to read. I thought that was terrific. I turned her on to the *Little House on the Prairie* series because of her interest in family relationships. I think a lot more work needs to be done to help [the kids] reflect on what it means to be a successful learner – we need to together develop a list that we'll add to and refer to all year about what it means to be a good learner.

(Note: During the last school year the teacher and his class developed a description of what it means to be a successful learner. They continued to use it throughout the year. The teacher plans to continue activity in subsequent years.)

As they received the raw data, laboratory staff created a database in FileMakerPro in preparation for the October meeting, which would focus on initial data analysis. The design of this meeting offers an example of how the laboratory staff were trying to change their own practice: In the past, they would have designed activities for participants where they had already solved the challenges and could package the experience. This time, they decided to engage people in work that needed to be done rather than work that had already been done. Therefore, no pre-work was done on the student responses other than entering the raw data into the data base, then printing legible, transcripts without names from eight students of each of the eight teachers.

What We Learned From Students: First Year

> They mention me explaining things too often in my opinion. I guess I do too much explaining and don't allow enough investigation at times.
> ---AWP fourth-grade teacher

For the October 1993 meeting, NEIRL staff prepared the data for analysis from the eight teachers who had collected data in the previous year. Twelve additional teachers brought data to the meeting so their material was incorporated as well. Members began developing what became codes as they made sense of the student data. They looked for patterns in the raw data, including connections between students' answers and their age and gender. Members worked on selected questions and sets of students so that there would not be duplication at this initial stage. Teachers were asked to predict students'

answers before they examined data. This whetted curiosity, thereby engaging even people who had not collected their own data.

Members could tell that few of the responses to the first question seemed to indicate that students felt unsuccessful in school; this was borne out by later analysis. In Question 1, students were asked not only whether they considered themselves successful learners in and out of school, but also to characterize how they knew they were successful or unsuccessful. Table 7.2 summarizes results for the "successful learner" questions. Most students (233 out of 309) said they felt successful both in and out of school. Among those who did not feel successful, individuals cited poignant examples of lack of success, such as "...because my teacher yells at me."

Table 7.2

Student Responses to the Questions:
Do You Consider Yourself a Successful Learner? In School? Out of School?
(N=309)

	In School: Yes	In School: No	In School: No Answer	Total
Out of school: Yes	233	8	3	244
Out of School: No	15	3	1	19
Out of School: No Answer	36	3	7	46
Total	284	14	11	309

Review of the first question zeroed in on those students who answered affirmatively the question, "Do you consider yourself a successful learner – in school?" Members looked at the ways in which students considered themselves successful learners--that is, how they could tell they were successful. They saw a great variety of responses, which fell into two broad groupings: 1) External signals – for example, students said they know they're successful learners because, "I get good grades," "...because the teacher tells me," and "because I follow the rules"; and, 2) Internal signals – "because I can use what I

learn in other places," and "because I work hard." Many students combined external and internal signals. The working party members came to call the first type of response (external signals) "the good student" and connected it to research on that topic (for example, Farkas et al., 1990). The second type of response (internal signals) was labeled "learner." Members compared the list of internal signals or "learner" with a "start list" of characteristics of successful learners developed from recent research by the laboratory and others (see Owen, Cox, & Watkins, 1994; McComb, et al., 1993).

In subsequent analysis, the group created a third category, "subject mastery,' which includes responses where students said they knew they were successful learners because they were "good in math," "good in English," etc.

The working party members also looked at student responses regarding how they learn best and what teachers and schools do or could do to help them learn. For example, student responses included:

- the teacher can do nothing; everything is fine
- more field trips
- more time
- learning games/contests
- more fun
- more activities
- written project
- skits
- not boring
- less lecturing
- hands on

The most interesting findings for the facilitators were the teachers' reactions to the data and the process of analyzing them. Teachers were not defensive about what their students said. Indeed, many offered observations based on their knowledge of individual children: e.g., one urban teacher remarked that the little boy who defined "successful learner" as a person who has friends was a student who did not receive high grades.

Many teachers were intrigued by what the student data told them and wanted to share it with other teachers, administrators, students, and parents. A common reaction was that "the students know what they like and need and are telling us." In answer to the question about what teachers do to help the students learn, one student replied:

> I learn math and my teacher taught me a lot of other stuff. They wrote on the board 2 pluses equal something and then I wrote it down on a piece of paper. They taught us how to make things for the science fair and how to cook devil eggs. They taught us how to learn.

Some teachers who administered the survey at the end of the previous school year (spring 1993) found that the timing was not great: Some of the students did not take it seriously, while others found it a useful culmination to the year's work. Several teachers heard their words echoing from students. When students uttered phrases such as "stay in your seats," and "pay attention to me," teachers realized ruefully that students do listen to them and take cues. In answer to the question about what it means to be a successful learner one student replied, "It means that you know, you learned a few things and you remember them and follow directions and being good all the time."

By the end of the meeting, teachers were asking about the influence of the larger school environment. One urban teacher in particular noted that almost all the responses in some classrooms were compliance- and rule-oriented, something she and other teachers encountered as teachers when they attempted new things. Teachers discussed the need to articulate expectations explicitly through contracts and agreements among students in a class regarding quality learning and learning environments.

The group came away with issues to further analyze, such as: Younger students were classified as external more than older students, but teachers of older students had also done more self-assessment work in the classroom. Another issue was that teachers wanted to know more about gender influences. They also wanted to know whether there would be differences across classrooms in the same school. These questions were pursued in the second year of the working party.

What Happened With Student Data: First Year

> Another time I would...clarify the term "learning" as it appears that a number of students only equate it with good grades and the behavioral qualities noted on our report cards.
> ---AWP sixth-grade teacher

Some teachers changed their practice as a result of individual reflection after asking their students the questions. Others who had not collected data were spurred by the October 1993 discussions to do so. Still others innovated: One rural fourth grade teacher asked similar questions of parents (cf. Anthony et al., 1991).

As a result of the first-year effort, some working party members wanted to include more colleagues from their own schools in the work. They wanted to both share their work and invite others to examine learning, teaching, and assessing. They already could tell that their schools gave many different messages about learning. This desire to include others was in line with a purpose of the assessment working party: to make individual work on authentic assessment more systemic and capable of having an impact on the larger school community.

Working With Students: The Research Effort in the Second Year

> Participation in our school was voluntary, kind of through the back door. Perhaps teachers should take the survey themselves to include in their own portfolios.
> ---AWP fourth- and sixth-grade teachers in the same school

In the second year of the assessment working party, work shifted from individual teachers and their classrooms to a schoolwide approach. The aim in doing this was three-fold: 1) to pursue questions of interest across classrooms in the same school; 2) to use question-asking to think about student learning; and 3) to encourage teachers to create a more cohesive sense of successful learning (and the teaching and assessing that support it).

Involving more teachers did not necessarily mean that everyone in a school was involved. Rather it broadened the research effort to include a group of teachers asking questions across classrooms and processing the data together.

A Shift to Asking Questions Across Classrooms

Between October 1993 and spring 1994, members of the working party collected data individually, and as a group explored learning and learning environments. The members spent an evening working with Eleanor Duckworth, who astounded people by saying that she never asks a child a question to which she knows the answer. The group also met with Evangeline Stephanakis who was researching environments for children whose first language was not English. They read about Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1985) and they visited schools attempting to create environments that develop them.

At the last meeting of the working party, members decided to survey students schoolwide. Laboratory facilitators encouraged people to pace themselves through the entire inquiry process – not only to collect data but also to analyze and develop implications from the analysis. Facilitators also suggested that more teachers and students of different ages be involved. For example, it would be better to have one student from each grade involved than only second and third graders.

What the Schools Did Back Home

Members from six schools agreed to administer the survey or collect data from students throughout their schools. Teachers in all six schools asked questions of their students during the early fall of 1994. Participating schools exchanged information and shared with others from around the region at the laboratory's annual Designing Schools for Enhanced Learning fall conference. Representatives from three of the six schools attended the conference. Their research effort is chronicled in the sections that follow. The schools, two rural and one urban, serve more than 800 students in grades K-5 or K-6.

Teachers administered the survey in a variety of ways. Carl Hunter, an urban school, surveyed 119 youngsters in two fourth grades, one fifth grade, and three sixth grades, with students completing surveys themselves. Lakeside, a rural school collected data from 70 students in seven classrooms (about half of the school), including two first grades, and a kindergarten, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade. Teachers of the younger students conducted interviews, while older students completed

survey forms. Summit Lane, the other rural school surveyed one fourth, one sixth, and one K-1 multi-grade classroom. The sixth graders answered the questions in survey form, while the fourth graders addressed the questions in the form of a letter to their next year's teacher.

Successful Learner Session at the DSEL Regional Conference

> Being a successful learner means that you learn quickly, but not so fast you don't know what you're doing. It means that you know what you've learned so that you can teach someone else.
> ---Sixth-grade student

During the fall, laboratory facilitators and teachers from the six schools discussed data collection and design of the DSEL fall conference session. The teachers from the three schools organized and presented their data at the conference in November.

Teachers and administrators from other partner schools, who were workshop participants, reviewed the raw data and generated questions to pursue in further analysis. The six teachers and one principal who conducted the session shared the spotlight and worked well in unaccustomed ways. They felt the experience was an enriching professional development opportunity. They also reflected with peers on what they had done, guided others in studying the project, and moved their work forward so it could be analyzed by colleagues.

What We Learned From Students: Second Year

> I consider myself a successful learner because I have learned so much knowledge and interesting facts in this school that I feel I can't learn anything else without exploding.
> ---Sixth-grade student

Of the 119 students at Carl Hunter School who responded to the survey, all but one said, "Yes, I am a successful learner in school." In defining a successful learner, 51 percent (61 students) cited external signals (good grades, teacher tells me, stay out of trouble, get right answers). Twenty-nine percent (34) listed internal signals (I try hard, feel smart, do my best, find out new things, ask questions, learn about myself). Twenty percent (24) gave mixed responses. Of the two fourth-grade classes, one was split

between external and internal, and the other was almost all external. The fifth-grade class was largely internal, and the three sixth-grades were mostly external.

Student responses generated a series of questions:

- Why would the sixth grade define learning more externally?
- Wouldn't it seem likely that students would self-evaluate more as they get older?
- What was going on in the fourth grade classroom that is externally focused?
- How could there be such differences between fourth and fifth grades?

Carl Hunter School teachers noted that the fourth-grade teacher whose students responded externally "uses rewards for everything." Conversely, the fifth-grade teacher with almost all internal responses had worked to break the students of the habit of expecting rewards.

Eighty percent (56) of the 70 students at Lakeside School, responded affirmatively to the question, "Are you a successful learner in school?," nine percent (6) answered, "No," and 11 percent (8) replied, "Sometimes." Of the 56 students who said they were successful learners in school, 57 percent (32) defined successful learning externally, 34 percent (19) internally, and 9 percent (5) mixed. Although some classrooms were identified with one source of motivation over the other, participants discerned no pattern by grade or teacher. There also did not seem to be any difference between girls and boys.

Summer Lane School teachers presented data from 40 students in fourth and sixth-grade classes only (they did not bring the data from the K-1 grade with them). Their group had a lively discussion that yielded information about the question, "What can the teacher do to help students learn?"

What Happened With Student Data: Second Year

Although the data collection and analysis were not conducted according to the strictest canons of research, both presenters and participants were engaged and energized by the joint work done in the session. Many believed that they needed to look more closely at the data, involve others in analysis, and check the data coding across more raters.

Educators who led the session advocated some of the strategies used in the working party, such as asking colleagues to predict how students would answer questions before examining the survey results from their classrooms.

As a result of the work at the conference, two of the schools decided to look more closely at the practices of teachers where students gave different types of responses. What is going on where students define successful learner indicators in external versus internal terms? Is there a difference in the teachers' definition of learning and in their goals around student self-reflection and self-assessment? What exactly do teachers do to develop more self-directed attitudes and skills in students? Finally, how do teachers perceive the students in the classroom as exhibiting these skills and dispositions?

The work overall – findings from the data analysis being part of a larger whole – spawned different activities in each school. Carl Hunter School created a new assessment committee that met once a week in the summer of 1994 to read articles and look at alternative assessment. This was one forum for discussing the findings and learnings from the project.

At least one teacher interviewed parents as well as students, focusing on their respective views of successful learners. The teacher also gave parent-child homework around the topic, such as setting goals together; thinking about what high school the students would attend; and college, career, and life choices. Once the teacher had collected the information, she asked her students how best to use it. They drew pictures of themselves that depicted their personal journeys.

Carl Hunter School committed itself to working schoolwide on learning, assessment, and teaching issues. Having a teacher and the assistant principal participate in the working party made an organizational approach more feasible. The two working party members are working with the junior high school to bring those teachers into the student inquiry work.

Lakeside School is also committed to working schoolwide. One consequence of their work was that sixth-grade teachers wrote to seventh-grade teachers at the junior high school about the survey and the students. This initiated an ongoing dialogue.

The commitment at Summer Lane School is being carried by a few teachers. The principal supported the project, but is not actively involved in it. Some climate issues seem to impede the study of student self-assessment from being a concerted schoolwide effort. Teachers who choose to be involved do so voluntarily and because they have heard about it from other teachers.

The K-1 multi-age teacher had students who were moving on to other teachers write what they had learned about themselves. One of the teachers who received these missives wrote back to the students telling them how much he had learned from reading their letters.

The fourth-grade teacher administered the survey to her class three times. In the beginning of the year, she gave the students the survey with no preparation. In the middle of the year, she talked with them about the survey, and the class discussed how it related to their portfolio work and peer editing. When she administered the survey at the end of the year, she said that students used it to talk with one another, even though her instructions were that they complete it on their own. They were excited about the survey and how it connected to their portfolios and wanted to talk their ideas and answers through with peers.

Students in this class write in their portfolios every week about how the week went, what was successful, what could have gone better, and what they need to do next. The teacher said that being reflective friends who help each other think about their work enriched the students survey responses. She saw significant change in how the students were thinking between the beginning and end of the school year.

What We Learned Overall

> Schools celebrate what has been learned rather than the learning itself.
> ---DSEL conference participant

The old saw goes that students in the United States are the most tested and least examined in the world. In most assessment, teachers' attention is focused on the tests, and students' attention is riveted on the teacher, rather than everyone's attention zeroing

in on learning. In the assessment working party effort, teachers were listening for students' responses, not just looking for right answers. They were energized by what they got back from students and wanted to do more. The working party appeared to achieve genuine question-asking in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

Most educators' exposure to research is in methods classes in preservice education, where formal technique is emphasized. Inadvertently, curiosity and question-asking may be squelched. Yet the power in research is asking good questions and designing work that is valuable in and of itself (that is, there are learnings and results from each part, not just "at the end," wherever that is). Inquiry creates the space for looking at things differently; space for inquiry is created by silence, by pushing the "pause" button in the busy routines of classrooms, schools, and larger systems.

To have inquiry and silence, people and organizations must learn to routinely set aside time, then they must learn to use that time well.

In a school that has learned to inquire collaboratively, the components of the research process – design, data collection, analysis, use – flow from one part into another. Cycles of questioning are continuous as well. The process achieves a rhythm where results flow into design in continuous steps (Watkins, 1995). Inquiry becomes a way of working both individually and organizationally. To get to schoolwide impact, we saw again that teachers and administrators need to be involved in the professional learning as well as the implementation effort.

As Huberman (1995) outlined, professional learning proceeds on both an intra-school and cross-school basis, two strands woven together. Educators are reshaping their organizations to continuously ask questions and pursue answers as an integral part of the work of facilitating children's learning. Professional development is increasingly embedded in the work as well. When the learning of children and the learning of adults are woven together through questioning, each fosters the other (Belenky et al., 1986). Adult and child learning becomes question- and problem-based rather than answer-driven (Robinson, 1993). This is as it should be: The reason many teachers go into education is because they themselves love learning!

Through observing children and asking them what's on their minds, teachers and other adults learn and are continuously reminded that students are individual people who try to make sense of the world: Their learning is distinct from teachers' goals and teaching. They are reminded that the learning of individual students will take a variety of forms and will be different from one another and from what the teacher thinks she has taught. These were all insights for the working party educators.

Additionally, teachers reported that the continuous feedback of students actively engaged in learning stimulated their own learning as well

"The students are telling us what they want and need. We need to listen to them." When teachers work with students on self-assessment and reflection, youngsters apparently come to see themselves as agents in their learning. Exploring this question further is a topic for further research: in inquiry, answers beget questions.

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Chapter 8

What Students Think About Kentucky Reform

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Setting the Stage

Midway through the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, policymakers in Kentucky and elsewhere were asking, "How much systemic reform is taking place in Kentucky? What are students' perceptions of the changes in their education?" At the time the collaborative was designing its work, AEL's Kentucky board members were also interested in the effects of statewide reform on Kentucky's students. They felt it was important to ask the most important consumers about education reform efforts. To help answer such questions, AEL agreed to conduct a study to capture students' perceptions of KERA.

Overview of the Study and Findings

The main objectives of the project were to 1) describe what students think school reform ought to accomplish, and 2) describe students' perceptions of their education since the passage of KERA and any changes they perceive in their school. The two primary audiences for this chapter are education practitioners and researchers in Kentucky and elsewhere interested in educational reform, and those interested in methods to collect data from students.

Generally, Kentucky students know that education is different since KERA began. Students now talk about dealing with portfolios, new assessment techniques, and more group work, and they report that they write more. Students say that school reform is an effort to improve the educational system and to "help students learn more." The notion of improving student performance was not lost on students. Many reported that the reform should teach students skills for "the real world" and life after high school as well as

motivate students to learn. One student said, "I think it ought to make kids motivated and want to learn more." Another student said that testing was different and that "they want you to apply your knowledge to practical problems." Kentucky students know that they need to be prepared for college or life after high school, and many noted the need for the basics of writing, math, and English.

Further, students noted as meaningful the improvement in communication and interpersonal skills. KERA has increased stress on both teachers and students, and there is a great deal of concern about the new testing system. Another positive aspect of KERA, according to students, is school councils that are seen as doing what is best for students.

Background of KERA

In response to a lawsuit filed by 66 of Kentucky's poorest school districts, the Kentucky Supreme Court charged the Kentucky General Assembly with recreating and reestablishing a system of common schools in the Commonwealth (Rose v. Council for Better Education, 1989). The Kentucky General Assembly responded to the court mandate by formulating and passing one of the most comprehensive education reform laws in the nation – the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990.

The legislation calls for changes in curriculum, governance, and finance. The intent of changes in each of these areas can be briefly described as an effort to (a) instill a new philosophy that all children can learn and that educators know how to accomplish that, (b) rid the system of political influences, and (c) achieve equity in funding among districts.

The four-volume Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (House Bill 940) is more than 900 pages long. It is divided into three primary sections: curriculum, governance, and finance.

The legislation related to curriculum is shaped by the philosophy that all children can learn. The primary role of the state is to 1) define what the student must learn rather than how they should be taught, and 2) hold schools accountable for producing these outcomes.

To determine if schools are successful in producing the required outcomes, KERA abolished the standardized testing program. The legislation mandated that a new performance-based assessment system be administered to a sample of students in each school on a biennial basis. Schools are expected to demonstrate a specified level of improvement in the proportion of students achieving from one testing period to the next. Schools that reach their threshold will receive financial rewards; schools that fail to improve or actually decline in performance will be sanctioned.

A major part of the reform effort in Kentucky is the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS). KERA mandates that students be tested in grades four, eight, and 11. The annual assessment has three parts: 1) multiple-choice and short-essay questions; 2) performance tasks that call for students to work together in groups or individually to solve simulated, real-life problems; and 3) portfolios that present each student's best work collected throughout the school year. The assessment measures both student progress and school success. Assessment results will place students into one of four performance levels: 1) novice (the student is beginning to show an understanding of new information or skills); 2) apprentice (the student has gained more understanding, can do some important parts of the task); 3) proficient (the student understands the major concepts, can do almost all of the task, and can communicate concepts clearly); or 4) distinguished (at this highest level, the student has deep understanding of the concept or process and can complete all important parts of the task). At the distinguished level, the student also can communicate well, think concretely and abstractly, and analyze and interpret data. The novice level recognizes the child as a beginner, not a failure.

KERA also mandates several components aimed at eliminating student failure and ensuring that all students learn. These include a preschool program for at-risk and handicapped four-year-olds, family resource centers and youth services centers, replacement of grades K-three with a non-graded primary program, and an extended school services program for students who need additional time to meet requirements. All schools in the commonwealth are expected to switch to school-based decision making (SBDM), in which a council of one administrator, three teachers, and two parents sets school policy designed to help students achieve the mandated requirements.

Working With Students

The procedures for this study included site selection, student participant selection, and data collection techniques. AEL staff collected data from students using a brief inventory, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Staff also conducted an interview with the principal at each site to provide an appropriate context for the student responses.

Selecting Sites and Students

The study plan called for visits to three districts across Kentucky to interview students. General criteria for site selection included: documented implementation of various KERA components, geographical representation, and an urban/rural mix. Three county districts were identified: one in western Kentucky, one in eastern Kentucky, and one in central Kentucky.

The western Kentucky site consisted of one junior high school that served about 1,000 students in grades seven through nine, and a high school that served about 1,700 students in grades ten through 12. Both schools served a rural population, and each had a small percentage of minority students.

The eastern Kentucky site consisted of one middle school that served about 650 students in grades six through eight, and a high school that served about 700 students in grades nine through 12. Both schools served a Caucasian rural population.

The central Kentucky site consisted of one middle school that served about 900 students in grades six through eight, and a high school that served about 1,200 students in grades nine through 12. Both schools served an urban population and a significant number of minority students.

In each district, students at both a middle/junior high and a senior high school were interviewed. Elementary school students were not interviewed because of the time and fiscal limitations associated with the study.

In each site, school personnel were instructed to randomly select a sample of ten students (five from each of the upper two grades at both the middle/junior and senior high

schools) to participate in a focus group interview. In addition, six students (three from each of the upper two grades at both the middle/junior and senior high schools) were to be randomly selected by school personnel to participate in individual interviews.

Collecting Data

AEL staff developed three data collection instruments to collect student responses and developed one for use with principals. First, a brief inventory concerning selected KERA components was administered to students participating in the focus group interview. This inventory served two purposes. It helped the researchers determine students' familiarity with KERA programs before discussion started. It also helped focus student thinking on KERA before the focus group interview. The inventory was completed by students at the beginning of the focus group interview. Students involved in individual interviews responded to the same questions as those in the focus group.

When student interviews were completed, an exit interview was conducted with the principal at each site. The purpose of this interview was to provide preliminary feedback from the student interviews to the principal and to determine which, and to what extent, KERA components had been carried out in each school.

What We Learned From Students

Clearly, students in Kentucky care about their education. Systemic reform has obviously affected students at many levels. Though the effect may be experienced to different degrees, students were aware of the changes and could describe their effects.

The information collected from the site visits is summarized below by data collection method. Principal interview data is not included here, though it is available from AEL in the full report. Because student responses were similar from the individual and focus group interviews, they are combined and summarized below.

What We Learned from the Student Inventory

Staff collected data from 63 students using the inventory. Responses suggest that students were more familiar with the academic components of KERA affecting all students (i.e., portfolios and new assessment techniques) than with those affecting only some (i.e., extended school services).

Students were also asked on the inventory to name one thing they knew most about KERA. For middle school students, the most frequent response was "portfolios" (noted 11 times), with "group work," "more writing," and "new assessment system" mentioned five times each. Only one student suggested not knowing much about KERA.

The responses of the high school students echoed those of the middle schoolers. Portfolios were mentioned most frequently (12 times) followed by group work (eight times). The high school students noted writing less frequently (only twice), but did mention change more frequently (six times) than the middle schoolers. "Obviously," said one student, "the state of Kentucky would not be making all the schools in Kentucky reform if it was going to do no good at all. It seems that with this much change, KERA is bound to prove productive in the future." Another student added, "We are using KERA to try and better the education system of Kentucky because of its weaknesses."

What We Learned from Student Interviews

Six students in each school (N=36) participated in one-on-one interviews with AEL staff. Individual interviews were conducted in a quiet part of the school for 10-20 minutes. Focus group interviews were conducted with samples of eight-12 students. All students randomly selected chose to participate and seemed to answer questions freely. Their responses are summarized below by question.

1. In your own words, what do you think school reform in Kentucky means? Clearly, students thought school reform was an effort to improve the educational system in Kentucky and to "help students learn more." Students noted that school reform assisted students in learning to work in groups and with others, was a new way of teaching, and an effort to improve students' writing. Some students thought of reform as a way to improve

discipline, provide for equality of schools throughout the state, or to "make school easier" for students.

2. What should school reform accomplish? The most frequent theme was to improve student performance or "help students learn more." Students also thought reform should: teach students to work in groups and with other people; teach students skills for the "real world" and life after high school; motivate students to learn; and make school fun.

3. What changes have you noticed in your education since KERA was implemented in 1990? The most frequently reported change was that of increased group work. In addition, many students described an increase in the amount of writing they did. A student noted that the testing was different. "They want you to apply your knowledge to practical problems," he said.

Some students noted negative changes. "Classrooms are not as productive," one student said, "Teachers fall behind and have to rush to cover all materials. The classroom is more stressful. I can tell that in the faces of teachers and administrators."

Extended school services. Most students reported being familiar with extended school services. Of the students who were familiar with the program, most reported that it was a good idea, helped students keep up, and allowed for more individualized assistance. Said one student, "It's great. Teachers have time to help kids pull up their grades and to teach kids more on subjects students are having trouble with."

Interdisciplinary group projects. This component was unfamiliar to students; most associated it with increased group work. In that context, students reported mostly positive comments concerning group work. Of those who responded in detail about this component, they described collaboration as very helpful and meaningful to them, indicated that different students made different contributions for the good of the group, and that group work increased their learning and skill development. One student commented, "It's good because it gives students a chance to work together. It's more like a real-life situation to solve a problem and work with people." A few students also commented that there was a problem with all students contributing. One said, "It's hard to get others in the group to work equally."

Portfolios. Students were clearly most familiar with portfolios. All students were involved in completing portfolios in both math and language arts. Many students noted that their writing assignments had increased. "At first I wasn't too thrilled about portfolios," said one student whose views reflected the opinions of most students. "But now I'm seeing that it's helping."

Students also noted increased pressure associated with portfolios, for both students and teachers. Some students described examples of teachers waiting until late in the year to assign portfolio pieces. One student reported, "I also feel they are not so good in some ways. The portfolios get crunched together." One student lightheartedly described the pressure for students. "I love to write and this falls under things I like to do. But teachers make a big deal out of portfolios – you would think each one is a presentation to God!"

New state assessment program. Most students were familiar with the KIRIS testing system, even if they had not actually taken the tests. Some sites were preparing for the testing. Some students reported not much difference from the "old state tests," but most students who were familiar with the new system noted the increase in the open-ended questions. They described the increase in writing. Some students thought that the new tests were more difficult. "They have tough questions," said one student, "Because of our experience with portfolios, we could understand the questions. I think it's better for the students."

Students noted that the testing was new and probably needed some modifications. One student offered, "It's just getting started. I mean, as KERA testing grows, teachers will understand it more and students will understand it more."

Youth services center. Only one school had a Youth Services Center at the time of the study. Students in other sites were not familiar with youth services centers. The students who had used or were familiar with them voiced positive opinions. "If you have a problem, you can talk to them about it," said one student. "It is really good because it gives us a place we can go and talk. It helps kids work out problems outside of school so they can concentrate on school."

School council (SBDM). Students were not as familiar with this component, though each school had formed a school council. Students often confused the council with PTAs or student councils. In one high school, students were more familiar with the council because student council representatives attended the council meetings.

4. Have those changes affected your education, and if so, how? The effect of the reform components on students seemed to relate primarily to writing and group work. The emphasis on writing was noted most frequently followed by the emphasis on group work.

Students thought they were being held more accountable as a result of the reform components, even though KERA does not mandate that students be accountable for their school's performance. Others indicated their own performance was better. "I am getting a lot better grades this year under this," said one student.

5. What are the two most important things you need to know or be able to do by the time you graduate from high school? Overwhelmingly, students thought they needed to be prepared for college or life after high school. Many emphasized the need for the basics of writing, math, and English. Working in groups or with others, communication skills, and good study habits were also noted.

6. What would you like to see KERA do for students in Kentucky? The most frequent response was to increase student performance and "help students learn more." Students also suggested that KERA should produce equal opportunity across the state, improve education in Kentucky, motivate students to learn, prepare students for the "real world," and produce well-rounded, responsible citizens.

Three students each thought that KERA should meet student needs, decrease the drop-out rate, and teach students to cooperate with others.

Some Limitations of the AEL Study

Before discussing the conclusions of this study, it is important to reiterate the purpose of this investigation. A qualitative research approach was selected to assess student perceptions and achieve the objectives of this study. Focus group interviews represent one useful technique: They help to determine the perceptions, feelings, and

manner of thinking of various consumer groups. The students of Kentucky are clearly the most important consumers of KERA.

Caution is in order, however, when employing such a qualitative approach. While the methodology associated with qualitative research elicits rich, in-depth responses, the information in this document is not intended to represent the views of students throughout Kentucky. It is intended to accurately represent the perceptions of the student participants in this study. Thus, while the conclusions discussed in this report do no apply to all Kentucky students, they may help generate hypotheses for further research.

A Summary of our Learnings

Students from three different districts and six different schools proved knowledgeable and articulate about those aspects of the reform that had affected them directly, especially writing portfolios.

Student comments indicated that they were aware of the perception that Kentucky schools and students are below the nation's average educational standards. Students felt KERA might help Kentucky students compete with students from other states for college admissions and employment.

Though students reported more work associated with the portfolios, most thought the portfolio work was improving their writing. Students said the math portfolios allowed them the opportunity to explain their work more thoroughly.

For the most part, students enjoyed the additional group work. Many indicated the importance of working with others in the real world, so the improvement in the communication and interpersonal skills was meaningful.

Students also reported that KERA had increased stress on teachers and students. Some worry about the state taking control of their school if performance is below threshold. The portfolio system elicits some stress due to deadlines. There appears to be a great deal of concern about KIRIS. Neither teachers nor students knew what to expect.

To the extent students were aware of them school councils seemed to be viewed positively. While some students viewed school governance as having been "political" in the past, most think the school councils are doing what is best for students.

Extended school services appeared to be useful to students. Though many participants had not directly engaged in ESS activities, they reported being aware of the services and described positive experiences of others.

Students described the importance of computers and technology. They also suggested that the reform should "make school fun." They reported that students learn more when school is enjoyable.

Overall, students thought KERA was having a positive effect on their education. Those who expressed negative opinions about KERA seemed to be primarily concerned with the effect that reform might have on preparation for and acceptance to college.

What Happened With Student Data

AEL staff developed a survey and sent it to AEL Board members, state department of education staff, policymakers, and legislators who had received copies of the report. In addition, AEL staff developed a brief phone interview protocol to use with the principals at each of the participating sites. These data are summarized below.

How Principals Used Study Results

AEL staff interviewed five of the six principals of the participating schools. One principal had since retired. The interviewer asked the principals about the ways the report was used. Most principals indicated that the report was shared with faculty and staff, but not with many people outside the school. "It let us know how our students felt and let us see how students in other parts of the state felt," said one principal. None of the principals reported unexpected outcomes of their school's participation. The principals suggested that the report supported their beliefs about their students' perceptions.

The principals were asked to rate (on a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high) the quality, organization, and usefulness of the report. Table 8.1 presents the means and standard deviations of those data.

Table 8.1

Principals Views of AEL Report
(n=5)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Quality	4.4	0.55
Organization	4.4	0.55
Usefulness	3.4	0.89

How Policymakers Used Study Results

Five of the eight policymakers returned a completed survey. One of the five indicated not having received the report. One of the remaining four indicated not having used the report. Another reported having shared the report with more than 200 people. Two reported using the report for planning. "It was helpful in the sense of being able to process with other reports and then use as a part of the ongoing dialogue regarding Kentucky Education," one policymaker said.

The policymakers were asked to rate (on a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high) the usefulness, credibility, and quality of the report. Table 8.2 presents the means and standard deviations of those data.

Table 8.2

Policymakers Views of AEL Report
(n=5)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Usefulness	4.0	0.0
Credibility	4.0	0.82
Quality	4.3	0.50

How State Department Staff Used Study Results

Three of five state department of education staff returned a completed survey. All indicated having read the report and shared findings with fellow staff and legislators. One of the respondents indicated having used the report as a focus for "publications and a video." Another indicated the primary use as "an example when encouraging schools and school districts to 'listen to students'."

State department staff were asked to rate (on a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high) the usefulness, credibility, and quality of the report. Table 8.3 presents the means and standard deviations of those data.

Table 8.3

State Department Views of AEL Report
(n = 3)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Usefulness	4.3	0.58
Credibility	4.3	0.58
Quality	4.3	0.58

How State Legislators Used Study Results

Five of 33 legislators returned a completed survey. All indicated they had read the report. One respondent indicated retiring from the legislature. The other four respondents indicated using the report for their personal information. "One more item to add to my general impression of education reform," noted one. Another legislator reported having shared the report with teachers and parents suggesting "there is much interest here on KERA."

Legislators were asked to rate (on a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high) the usefulness, credibility, and quality of the report. Table 8.4 presents the means and standard deviations of those data.

Table 8.4

State Legislators Views of AEL Report
(n=5)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Usefulness	3.6	0.55
Credibility	4.0	1.22
Quality	4.0	0.71

How AEL Board Members Used Study Results

Three of the seven AEL board members from Kentucky returned a completed survey. All indicated they had read the report. One respondent indicated having shared results with faculty in hopes of incorporating findings into discussion in their courses. Another reported having used the report in speeches and in discussion groups about education reform. The third said, "Personally it has helped to satisfy my own findings about how students think about KERA..."

AEL board members were asked to rate (on a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high) the usefulness, credibility, and quality of the report. Table 8.5 presents the means and standard deviations of those data.

Table 8.5

AEL Board Member Views of AEL Report
(n = 3)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Usefulness	4.3	0.58
Credibility	4.3	1.15
Quality	4.7	0.58

Summary and Conclusions

It appears that principals of the participating schools thought the report was of high quality, but rated the usefulness of the report lower. It seems as if the information provided them evidence for what they already knew. However, it does appear that other stakeholders who were interested in students' views thought the report was useful, credible, and of high quality. Some respondents reported only using the report for their own informational purposes. Many reported sharing the report with others and having used the report as an example of hearing student voices. Generally, AEL's study provides answers to questions principals are not asking at this time.

Of interest is the fact that no principal or stakeholder said they shared the report with students. AEL's report was not specifically sent to any students, so they were not included in the follow up interviews or surveys.

The project appears to have been useful in a few meaningful ways. First, all involved reported listening to students as very important. Second, since gathering data from students on educational reform has been limited, the report provided information in a needed area. Third, it seems that interested stakeholders viewed the report as useful and credible, again suggesting the importance of collecting information from students. Finally, given the depth of the reform effort in Kentucky, additional information about the reform and the effect of the reform effort on students is of import to other interested stakeholders.

Chapter 9

Common Themes and Learnings From the Case Studies

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The seven case studies presented in the previous chapters represent the views of more than 1,000 students who come from diverse communities and schools across the country. The sites are varied in their approaches to school improvement and restructuring, but they all share in common a commitment to making school a more learning-centered and engaging place for students. Part of this commitment is listening to what students have to say. Taken together, the case studies provide a strong voice for the most important but most silent stakeholders in the school restructuring movement – the students.

In the case study chapters, what students had to say was presented side by side with a description of the school change context so that connections could be made between the two. In this chapter, we move to some broader themes and learnings across these varied settings. Drawing such generalizations is risky because the contexts, the questions asked of students, and the research methods are diverse. Yet some larger themes did emerge which are presented here along with implications and some unanswered questions generated by the findings. Our conclusions are divided into what we learned from the data and what we learned from the process of asking students what they think about learning and school.

What We Learned from the Student Data

Three broad themes emerged from the words and ideas expressed by students. First, students are keen observers of how people relate to each other within the school walls. These relationships matter very much to students as they reflect on their learning, perhaps as much or more than the school's formal learning activities.

Second, the data clearly support a variety of learning styles across this broad group of students. While cognitive research has demonstrated that different learning styles exist, it is reaffirming to hear the same message directly from the mouths of students. The results not only indicate individual differences in learning style, but point to the need for variety in learning activities for all students.

Finally, student views of being a successful learner fall far short of the lofty ideals of the school restructuring movement. Students continue to view success in very traditional terms even in schools that are trying hard to change the paradigm of teaching and learning. Further, student views of success in school are quite different and limiting in comparison to their views of success outside of school. Each of these themes is discussed more fully, drawing upon relevant examples from the seven cases.

Relationships Matter to Students

More than a decade ago, reviewers of effective schools research commented on how people matter more than practices in academically effective schools (Clark, Lotto & Astuto, 1984). The students we talked to seemed to be conveying this same message. As students reflected on what helps them learn, the theme of human relationships came up as an essential element that sets the stage for successful learning.

At Dickinson Elementary School, a family atmosphere was described by students from kindergarten through sixth grade in which caring for others, respect for people and rules, and helping one another were predominant features of the school's new culture. At Juan Perez and Royal High Schools, the theme of relationships seemed to be even stronger. Royal students had very high expectations for their teachers which went beyond good teaching. They wanted teachers with "personality" who were energetic, motivated, and treated students with the respect due a young adult. Perez seniors were also very mindful of relationships and the positive steps the faculty had taken to build a climate of caring and respect. When asked what teachers were doing to help them learn or what they wished teachers would do, interpersonal factors were mentioned more often than academics at Perez. These interpersonal factors included teachers who go out of their way for students, who command respect, and who relate to students as friends. Because

safety was an issue at Perez, part of the caring climate was protecting students from disruptive classmates and the drugs and gangs lurking on the fringes of campus.

Students in California and from the Eastern middle school also revealed the importance of relationships. California middle and high school students talked about the importance of a single individual who can make a difference by taking the time to help and coach students. While this individual was often a teacher, it could also be a parent or friend. The students seemed to be saying that the attitudes of the adults are as important as their actions. In California, a caring climate also extended to providing a safe school free from disruptive and dangerous elements. In the Eastern middle school, students also valued positive and personal relationships with adults and saw these relationships as a key to successful learning. The four teaching practices they rated as most helpful to their learning – attending to the student, maintaining a positive instructional tone, relating to the student, and making things clear – reflected relationship issues more than pedagogy. Yet these relationship-oriented practices were not what students reported experiencing in the classroom; instead they experienced the teacher as the person who delivers instruction and maintains order.

Woven throughout these findings about relationships is a sense of respect, caring, understanding, and safety. The relationship issue was captured most memorably in the maxim spoken by one of the Northeast students who said that it is hard to feel successful as a learner when the teachers keep yelling at you!

These results point to an imbalance in how school restructuring is typically approached. The energy on changing schools is often centered on organizational structures, school schedules, new curriculum and assessment, and pedagogy. However, students seem to be saying that equally or more important is putting energy into building better schoolwide relationships. Trust seems to be an underlying issue here. Students and faculty, particularly at the upper grade levels, need to trust and respect each other as a precondition for learning.

A Variety of Learning Styles and Variety in Learning Activities

The sites that addressed the issue of what helps students learn confirmed what cognitive research on thinking and learning has already discovered: There are multiple learning styles, and therefore no single best way for students to learn. This theme was most convincingly illustrated by the 400 seventh and eighth graders from the Eastern middle school whose survey responses were carefully coded to determine the factors that help and hinder learning. Across this large group of students, the list of factors that help learning was virtually identical to the list of factors that hinder learning. In other words, what helps one student hinders another.

Another example comes from the 28 Juan Perez High School seniors who also expressed a variety of learning preferences. Some students dreaded teacher lectures or individual work assignments. Others found these to be desirable ways to learn and were less enthusiastic about student-led group projects. Middle and high school students in California also expressed the need for different learning strategies. Further, students and teachers can view the same educational innovation quite differently. For example, while teachers in one California high school saw multi-age "family" classrooms as a valuable educational strategy for getting to know students better, the students were worried about getting stuck in a "dud" family. Thus, the value of a learning strategy is in the eyes of the beholder. Students may be less enthusiastic about some of the innovative strategies that teachers feel they are doing.

In the Eastern middle school, individual learning needs were not being met. Only 20 percent of the sixth graders reported that the teaching behaviors that help them learn were being frequently used by their teachers. The results were more positive when students were asked about "classroom activities" instead of "teaching behaviors." Still, less than half the students showed congruence between the "classroom activities" that help them learn and the activities they experience in the classroom. There was a similar mismatch when the student vision of learning was compared to what students perceived as the teacher vision of learning.

While the theme of different learning styles was evident, there was a tendency (especially for upper-grade students) to gravitate towards more relevant, experiential,

project-oriented, and real-world learning. This sentiment was strongest at Royal, where high school students seemed to be rebelling against what they viewed as a steady diet of humdrum, routine classes. They overwhelmingly reported that they learned far more outside of school than inside. Outside learning, they said, was self-directed, relevant to their lives, and hands-on. Likewise, the seniors who were about to graduate from Perez felt that classes and assemblies should focus more on survival and life skills. There also seemed to be a leaning towards hands-on, active learning among the Northeast elementary and middle school students. In the Eastern middle school, students also viewed active learning as the best way to learn.

Researchers asked Kentucky middle and high school students how state reforms have affected them. Here again, students indicated a positive view of direct experience learning activities such as portfolios and collaborative group projects. Kentucky students believed that these learning strategies challenged them and helped develop important life skills. Students were generally positive about the Kentucky reforms. However, results also showed how innovations such as portfolios can be rewarding for some students and difficult for others. Kentucky students appeared to be torn in their attitudes towards portfolios: some believed portfolios helped them become better writers, while others felt stressed by the presentations and deadlines. Once again, this points to individual differences and personal preferences that cannot be ignored when implementing sweeping educational reforms in the classroom.

To some extent, these results go against the current grain of more active, constructivist, and group-oriented learning. Many students are comfortable with traditional classrooms in which learning is passive and accompanied by the old mainstays of teacher lectures, worksheets, quizzes, and individual assignments. Not all students endorse more active learning approaches as the best way to help them learn. A caveat is in order: Students may simply be expressing a comfort level with that which is familiar (i.e., the passive classroom) and may not have had enough active learning experiences in school to make meaningful judgments about their value. An important question from this collection of studies is: Do students experience significantly more active learning activities in these restructuring schools? Data from the Eastern middle school indicate that while

many students want more active learning, what they tend to experience in the classroom is pen-and-paper activities. Students from Royal High School also paint a picture of passive classroom learning activities. In such classrooms, the occasional student-led group project or performance task may simply not stand out as students reflect on their everyday learning experiences.

There is an implication in these findings beyond the obvious one that teachers must accommodate different learning styles. Students want a variety of experiences to make learning more engaging and meaningful. Thus, the theme of variety not only cuts across individuals and groups. It also applies equally to the individual student who, like an adult in the workplace, is more motivated during the workday when presented with task variety and choice.

While students may have a preferred learning style, they certainly need a repertoire of learning skills (e.g., from independent study to working in groups). Teachers must help students make transitions between their preferred learning strategies and those which are less preferred but that help them develop important skills.

How Students Spell Success

Student views of a successful learner do not stack up very well to the new paradigm of learning held by many reform-minded adults. Students tend to define success in traditional terms, focusing on good grades, good behavior, conforming to school rules, persistence, effort, and doing what adults expect of them. It is not that these are bad things for students to strive for. However, they represent a very limited view of success that does not measure up to the 21st century vision of learners. These depictions indicate a passive, compliant learner rather than students who strive to become active constructors of their own knowledge, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners.

What is surprising about this result is its consistency across the cases representing different grade levels, different contexts, and both fledging and mature restructuring efforts. It doesn't seem to matter where the students are in their school career or what curricular, instructional, or assessment changes are happening around them. They still adhere to the old views of learning while their teachers may have quite different

expectations of success based on innovations such as portfolios, community-based learning, and student-led group projects. Students are not necessarily negative toward these classroom reforms, as the Kentucky students clearly demonstrate. But the reforms have not penetrated the student mind-set of what school is and what it should do. Students still look at school as a place where you take directions from adults, work hard on the assignments teachers give, complete the work, follow the school rules, and reap the extrinsic rewards.

The Northeast case provides insights into how teachers can become aware of and change messages about student learning. The Northeast teacher researchers distinguished between student views of success that were primarily extrinsic ("the good student" who views success as following the rules and obtaining good grades) and views that were intrinsic ("the learner" who feels successful by virtue of trying hard, applying what is learned, and asking a lot of questions). A mixed motivation category was also identified. There was a lot of variation found along this extrinsic-intrinsic dimension across several schools, with a healthy percentage of students (but not the majority) describing themselves more as "learners" than "good students." A more detailed analysis of classroom data indicated that some students understood and had adopted the new "learner" paradigm which teachers were consciously trying to change through their work with authentic learning and assessment. The classroom variation in one school was explained by the messages which teachers unconsciously gave. Thus, a teacher who used rewards for everything had "good students" while a teacher who consciously tried to break the reward habit had more intrinsically motivated "learners." Teachers give messages about learning through their actions as much as their words. By discussing student views of learning as a normal part of student assessment, teachers in the Northeast network were sending a more consistent message about the importance of learning rather than the importance of rewards.

An interesting twist in the findings on success was the contrast between student views of success inside of school versus outside of school. In the Eastern middle school, there was a stark contrast between how students viewed success in school and how they viewed success in life. While success in school focuses on conformity and compliance,

success in life means attaining personal attributes, choosing a good vocation, getting along with others, having self-esteem, and continuing to learn. The second list would undoubtedly impress many reform-minded teachers as a vision for a successful learner. Yet for many students, little connection is made between this vision and school life.

In a similar vein, Juan Perez High School seniors had quite different conceptions of what it takes to make it in life (e.g., being successful at relationships, mastering one's environment) versus succeeding in school (e.g., staying out of trouble, getting good grades). Similarly, Royal High School students said success in school meant putting forth a lot of effort, having good study habits, and completing assigned work. Royal students felt they learned best outside of school because learning was enriched by real-life experiences, building relationships, and accomplishing things. Some incongruities are present here in how students think they should behave in school and how they should behave in life in order to be successful adults.

In Kentucky, a strong state-driven reform message appeared to be penetrating student thinking. Students seemed to make a tighter connection between what they need to do to succeed in school and what they will need in life. This may be due in part to Kentucky students being asked directly about specific state reforms. Nevertheless, Kentucky illustrates that students can make connections between school success and life success if these connections are carefully articulated and continuously pointed out to students as part of a reform effort.

The main point is that students hear and understand the messages about learning and school conveyed by adults. For example, when Royal students defined success, they echoed the very core values of hard work and responsibility which the entire school community had agreed upon and promoted as part of the school's new mission and direction. Likewise, at Dickinson and Perez, students echoed the values and beliefs about good relationships embedded in the new school cultures. Teachers from the Northeast schools also observed how their own messages and the messages conveyed by the school culture can influence students' views of learning. An unanswered question from this set of studies is: To what extent did students hear a clear, consistent message about success in

school from the adults in these restructuring schools? Unless we can convey a clear signal, students will not have a clear vision of what a successful learner is.

Messages about what it means to be a successful learner come to students from many places. When answering questions about successful learning, students (especially the younger ones) are filtering their answers through what they hear from parents, peers, respected members of the community, and the mass media as well as what they hear from a variety of adults in the school. They are, to some extent, echoing societal views of success in school which may be far different from what reform-minded educators think. The task of instilling in students a more expanded view of success in school cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of the school faculty and staff.

Adults inside and outside the school need to be careful about unintentionally conveying mixed messages. Schools such as Dickinson and Perez, in which part of the re-culturing meant creating a climate free of disruptions and danger, suggest that school staffs can unwittingly convey mixed messages about what being a successful student means. One Northeast teacher noted how a more enlightened view of learning in the classroom can clash with the messages conveyed by a discipline- and rule-oriented school culture. In trying to bring order to the school, a faculty can push the ideas of good behavior and conformity too far, such that students incorporate these ideas too strongly into their self-concept of a successful learner. In other words, students may equate being a good school citizen with being a good learner.

What We Learned About the Process of Asking Students What They Think

The process of questioning students yielded important findings about including the student voice in school restructuring. First, we were pleasantly surprised at how articulate, aware, and even eloquent students can be when asked to reflect on their learning and school experiences. At all grade levels, we found students aware of what is going on around them in the name of educational reform from the schoolhouse to the statehouse. They hear the messages which adults consciously or unconsciously convey,

and can have strong opinions about their learning and schooling. Students welcomed the opportunity and were often eager to tell us what was on their minds. Contrary to the stereotype of alienated and aimless youth, we found students deeply interested in their education and future once they are asked for their views.

This leads to the second major theme. Students are rarely asked for their views about learning as schools go about restructuring. Asking students is simply not the norm. Most schools treat students as the products of school restructuring rather than active participants who can offer important insights and ideas, not to mention their personal commitment to the changes being made. Taking the time to stop, reflect, and ask questions seems to be a luxury which schools feel they have little time for. Our experience with talking to students suggests that asking them about their learning can initiate an important two-way communication between students and adults. This two-way communication can immediately reshape teacher practice and begin a dialogue among all stakeholders about student learning.

The third theme relates to the "how to" of including students in the dialogue and action around school restructuring. As this group of studies indicates, there are many ways to 1) ask students what they think, 2) involve the students themselves and the faculty in the research or inquiry process, and 3) provide a feedback loop so that the student voice becomes a more natural part of the school improvement process. The variety of approaches used has provided insights about the process of asking students what they think. Each of these areas is discussed below.

Students are Articulate and Aware

When adults ask clear questions with genuine interest, students will generally give honest answers about their learning experiences. They will express what they want and expect out of their teachers and school. It was our general impression that students were "telling it like it is." While students often echoed the messages they were hearing from adults in the building, they did not appear to be parroting the school's "party line." Particularly in the middle and upper grades, students often surprised us with sophisticated insights about what was going on and how they felt about their school, teachers, and

futures. The mere variety of views on what helps students learn tells us that students were thinking about our questions and had personal feelings about their learning experiences which they were eager to share.

Students at all grade levels were aware of what was going on across a wide range of settings, from changes in attitudes and culture at the school level to broad state-level reforms that were having a personal effect on them. Their perceptiveness was well-illustrated, for example, by the California and Kentucky students who identified and discussed the stress and confusion that goes along with the school restructuring process. Students not only felt personal stress over what was being asked of them (e.g., apprehension over portfolios), but also perceived the stress and confusion among the adults involved in the restructuring effort. Students are not passive recipients of what is happening around them. They deserve a more active role in the restructuring process so that they can feel a greater sense of control and ownership toward school and classroom changes made in their behalf. As Corbett and Wilson (1995) argue, students have as much of a role and stake in the change process as the adults; they should not be treated as silent partners.

Students not only provide an important voice about their learning, but at the high school level (and perhaps even at middle school) this voice can extend to design and implementation of the research process. Royal High School provided one example of how students can become more active in the restructuring process by leading the research effort. There was a conscious effort at Royal to turn the research about students over to students, with adults playing a supporting role. The student-led project became a way for a small group of students to become spokespersons for their classmates as the change process unfolded. It legitimized the student voice to the adults in a manner that was more credible than simply hearing students complain about school. It was also a way to bring some real-world, authentic learning to a group of student researchers who, as it turned out, heard many of their classmates complain about the lack of hands-on learning within the school.

It is possible that the quality of research can suffer by turning it over to the students. For example, Royal students conducted a rather hasty analysis based on

incomplete interview notes because the taped transcripts were unusable. But with guidance and support, students certainly can mount a credible research effort. There is also a strong validity argument for having student researchers interpret what other students are saying. Their ability to understand the language and tone of what is being said is an asset. Perhaps having students and staff (and even parents) work together to find meaning in the data is the best approach. It not only provides some checks and balances, but builds in some immediate two-way communication between young people and adults as part of the research process.

In a parallel fashion to the students at Royal, teachers in the Northeast network were actively engaged in their own inquiry process from the beginning. They took over the process by the second year as they tried to spread the research back at their own schools. This led to more ownership of the data and more likelihood that this kind of inquiry would become a natural part of teachers' everyday work. There was evidence that teachers changed their behavior as a result of their own inquiry and data collection. An important question is: Would they have changed as much had they not been so immersed in the inquiry process? Our hunch is that the changes would not have been as encompassing without their direct involvement.

Listening to Students Is Not the Norm

In our role as an external Restructuring Collaborative working with schools and larger systems to inquire about student learning, we felt very welcome in the many places we worked. Yet at the same time we were breaking new ground. It was clear that this kind of question asking about student learning was far from the norm in most schools across the country. Judith Warren Little (1990) has noted that teachers talking to other teachers about their work in order to rethink their teaching is more the exception than the rule in most schools. Our corollary is that adults talking to students about learning and teaching is even rarer.

This type of inquiry seemed to come as a breath of fresh air, especially when staffs were deeply involved in the research process. For example, Northeast teachers collaborated with each other and professional researchers to learn about and design ways

to tap into student views of learning. These teachers were enthusiastic about the process and eager to take these techniques back to colleagues in their own schools. An important point is that the inquiry was cast less as action research and more as a natural part of authentically assessing student learning. The teachers were energized by this process. For some of these teachers, this kind of inquiry was becoming more a way of life than a one-shot staff development activity.

In all of the schools, teachers and other staff members were remarkably open and non-defensive in hearing what students had to say. There were some cynics and naysayers who did not want to listen but more often than not staff members paid attention. Teachers were encouraged when they heard echoes of themselves or their school culture in the student voices, as exemplified by Dickinson. But they did not shy away from results that were critical of teaching practices, as exemplified at Royal.

While teachers and staff were willing to listen, it was equally clear that schools were often at a loss about what to do with the data. There were surely genuine efforts to share the findings with teachers, parents, and the students through staff development activities and formal or informal presentations. At the same time, there were no real mechanisms to integrate the student voice into decision making or improvement planning. As such, this kind of research risks becoming a one-time event that may change a few people's behavior, but quickly dissipates as the busy work of school grinds on. Channels need to be established to weave this kind of inquiry into restructuring activities throughout a school or larger system. These channels should include formal and organizational mechanisms (e.g., involving school site councils) and more informal and personal mechanisms (e.g., integrating this kind of inquiry into the routine collaborative work of teachers). This will increase the chances of inquiry about student learning becoming a more natural part of systemic change.

The jury is out as to whether student involvement in restructuring efforts will continue in the case study schools. Progress along these lines was noted in some of the cases, but time will tell if this kind of inquiry stays around. An important question here is: What kind of supports and organizational culture are needed to initiate and sustain some genuine questioning of students in restructuring schools? Two factors that came up in

these cases are trust and time. As the Northeast teachers exemplified, a climate of mutual trust among colleagues seemed to be one important ingredient. Involvement of school administrators and teachers was also critical. The time factor was noted in California, the Northeast, and at Dickinson school with younger students. Teachers and students need the time for this kind of inquiry which can be very labor intensive. This is especially true when interviewing younger students and during the data analysis phases.

While it takes time, two-way communication between adults and students about the learning process is both feasible and worth the effort. It can save time later by gaining early student commitment and focusing the restructuring work in the right places. This kind of inquiry can also provide invaluable information to school staffs about whether planned changes are hitting or missing the target. It challenges staffs to examine their own assumptions about student learning through the eyes of students and treats students as responsible agents of change rather than products of change. Asking students about their learning moves away from a "parent-child" model of restructuring in which adults make decisions on the behalf of young people without ever consulting them. Interestingly, this parent-child style of interaction was reflected in the many student responses we heard about conformity and obedience as being the essence of a successful student. Students and adults have learned this pattern of interacting quite well in American schools, and it will probably be a hard habit to break.

How to Conduct the Research

Many different methods of asking students questions and analyzing their answers are represented in this collection of case studies. The Restructuring Collaborative agreed upon a broad set of questions to ask students. The methods were purposely left open for individual laboratories and partner sites to work out. This was as much out of necessity, given the variety of places and what was already happening at each one as the collaborative research was being planned, as it was a conscious choice to let the methods evolve as they may. We were less inclined to prescribe a standard research design and more interested in letting the research take its own course, thereby allowing many different

methods to flourish. The analysis here reflects what we learned from this variety of approaches. First, the variety of techniques is summarized below.

Joshua Dickinson Elementary School

- Interviews conducted by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) researchers studying student perceptions in a "re-cultured" school
- Students interviewed in same-grade pairs with alternating questions for each student; n = 28 students selected to represent grades K-6 and achieve gender, ethnicity, and achievement balance
- Sixty-five open-ended interview questions adapted from Research for Better Schools protocol (included some of the Restructuring Collaborative questions); students could answer with words, picture, or poem
- Qualitative analysis of tape-recorded interview transcripts by SEDL researchers who collaborated with teachers in analyzing and interpreting the data

Royal High School

- Interviews conducted by student research team with guidance from school faculty and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
- Small focus groups randomly selected from each of 27 representative classes; n = 150 students in grades 9-12
- Restructuring Collaborative questions used with slight modifications to make them more in the language of a student-to-student conversation
- Thematic analysis conducted by some of the student researchers; based on partial interview transcripts (many of the audio tapes were unintelligible) supplemented by the interviewers recalling what students had said

Juan Perez High School

- A one-day intensive data collection and analysis effort by Restructuring Collaborative researchers, practitioners, and students working with Perez staff
- Students interviewed in pairs or threes by Restructuring Collaborative members; n = 28 high school seniors who were selected by staff to represent a range of student achievement and attitudes towards school
- Restructuring Collaborative questions were used

- A quick qualitative analysis on site in which summary responses were recorded for each question and then given to mixed teams who looked for themes and key findings

Eastern Middle School

- Interviews and surveys conducted by Research for Better Schools (RBS) researchers as part of ongoing research on "a day in the life of students"

- Different techniques, including interviews based on classroom observation to anchor the questions, and a 100-item open-ended survey which students completed as a writing project in several sittings. The survey asked a series of questions about how students view success in and out of school as well views of school, classroom, teachers, learning, parents/home, school work, other helping agencies, and teaming (included the Restructuring Collaborative questions); n = 697 students surveyed

- Student responses were systematically analyzed by RBS staff using empirically derived codes; qualitative and quantitative analyses

California Network of Restructuring Schools

- Interviews conducted by Far West Laboratory (FWL) researchers during evaluation site visits to ten elementary, middle, and high schools (urban and rural) participating in a California restructuring network

- Small focus groups conducted after observing students in classroom so that interview questions could be anchored; included some of the Restructuring Collaborative's questions; n = 160 students selected to represent classrooms within ten schools, and to achieve gender and language balance as well as engaged and unengaged students

- Qualitative analysis by FWL researchers

Northeast Teacher Network

- Research conducted by professional development network of elementary/middle school teachers and principals working with the Northeast and Islands Regional Laboratory (NEIRL); the research was built into authentic student assessment

- Many data collection formats used including interviews (some video- and audio-taped), surveys (including some developed by students), and teacher-created methods (e.g., students answer questions by writing a letter to next year's teacher); n = 309 students in grades K-6 across 12 urban, suburban, and rural schools

- Restructuring Collaborative questions were used as a framework, although teachers could modify and add questions

- Teachers collaborated with NEIRL researchers to code and make sense of student responses which were typed into a computer database; some quantitative analysis

Kentucky State Reform Assessment

- Study conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to assess student views of the Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA)
- Students first given an inventory which familiarized them with KERA reforms followed by focus groups or individual interviews; n = 48 students in middle through high school across three representative schools which had implemented KERA
- Questions focused on KERA reforms; some overlap with Restructuring Collaborative questions
- Qualitative analysis of interviews by AEL researchers

What researchers learned from these different approaches are organized below into key topical areas.

Student Age Level. The student interviews and surveys occurred across the full range of age groups from grades K-12. Students from all grade levels were able to respond to questions about their school and learning, although primary grade students tended to see things a little more simplistically than older students. The process of interviewing young students also requires more time, patience, short interview periods, and more creative ways for students to express themselves (i.e., drawing a picture or writing a story, poem, or letter). Older students have more school experience, more advanced analytical skills, and a longer attention span. However, questions about learning can sound vague to students of all ages so that anchoring them in classroom observations (as experimented with by Research for Better Schools and Far West Laboratory) has a lot of merit.

Student-Led Group Interviews. Some cautions should be noted when using student-led group interviews, such as those at Royal High School. At Royal, there appeared to be a conformity of responses not seen at the other sites. We wonder how much this was due to the use of student-led focus groups. Individual student voices can be drowned out by the crowd (especially among peer-conscious teenagers) in group interviews. The issue of peer group influence among older students was also noted in the California schools. Students interviewing other students in conversational groups is a good way to draw out views and attitudes that young people are less willing to share with

adults. However, student interviewers may need some coaching in group facilitation to ensure unbiased results and the airing of all points of view. For example, teaching student researchers to use simple probes (e.g., Does anyone have another opinion?) can reduce bias.

Recording Interviews and Notetaking. At Royal, where student groups were tape recorded, the lack of quality recordings and complete interview transcripts caused problems. As a result, the student researchers relied largely on their memory of what was said across a large number of groups. This points to the need for student researchers to do the same thing more experienced researchers do when tape recording – check the equipment and take good backup notes. Tape-recorded interviews provide a more thorough analysis, but are often too labor intensive for school-led research efforts with limited resources (i.e., the transcription time and analysis of hundreds of pages of transcripts). Accurate notetaking of key student ideas and words is a more feasible approach.

Maintaining Quality Research. Including students and teachers in the research design, implementation, and analysis has many advantages, but these advantages can sometimes come at the expense of research rigor. School staffs may be more interested in "getting it done" rather than "doing it right" in terms of valid and reliable research methods. The quality of the study becomes especially important when results are shared with school site councils, the school board and the community, and become part of school decision making. Schools may need help from regional laboratories, universities, or other research partners to ensure that the results are as reliable and valid as they can be. We found that school staffs feel relatively comfortable collecting data on students, but their comfort level and confidence seems to drop when faced with organizing and interpreting large volumes of "messy" qualitative data. The point should not be lost, however, that schools can be self-directed in this kind of research as long as they have the necessary support and technical guidance to conduct a high-quality study.

Involving All Stakeholders in Data Analysis. Engaging staff and students in the data analysis phase has real advantages, although it will require schools to set aside more time and resources. Teachers can fill in the blanks about what students are saying based

on what they know about their students and the classroom. Students understand the language and tone of what other students are saying better than adults, and can help interpret ambiguous answers. The important point is that no one individual or group has a corner on the truth in interpreting open-ended, qualitative data. Each perspective adds to the discussion and results in a more complete understanding of what students are saying. Parents did not participate in data analysis. They could add another important perspective given their deep understanding of their children, the values they try to instill, and the home situation. Engaging others in data analysis also creates ownership for the findings and therefore, increased likelihood that the results will be put to use.

How to Ask Students. Our experience tells us that there is no one best method to interview students. In reality, the methods are driven by the time, resources, expertise, and interest level of staff and researchers at a particular setting. The key is being flexible and creative rather than adhering to a single research design. Surveys are more efficient, but do not allow for the interaction and follow-up questions that are possible in an interview. Some creative ways were used for administering open-ended surveys to students, such as making the survey a student writing project (Eastern middle school) or having students respond with a letter, picture, or poem (Northeast and Dickinson). Interviews can be led by researchers, teachers, or other students. While interviews by teachers give the staff an active role in the research and provide immediate feedback, students may hold back criticisms of teaching practices with teachers. On the other hand, younger students may be more comfortable opening up to a teacher than a researcher who is visiting their school to ask questions. Student-to-student interviews can be advantageous, with the caveats noted earlier about peer group pressure. Adaptations also have to be made for special populations, such as having bilingual interviewers for non-English speaking students.

What to Ask Students. The Restructuring Collaborative developed core questions about student learning which sites often adapted. An external critic of our work pointed out some other important questions, such as asking students how they see their education fitting into their life aspirations, what students think of the specific reforms happening around them, and what they think more generally about teaching and learning

(Fullan, 1994). The point is that students can be good informants in many important areas beyond their general views of learning and school. Schools can devise more focused questions based on their own restructuring context and the major issues related to their own vision of improvement.

Sharing the Results. Restructuring Collaborative members learned important lessons about sharing results with school staffs and others. Feedback that is more personalized and interactive (e.g., asking teachers to guess how their students responded before giving them the answers and using game show formats) will probably be more readily heard, especially when schools are inundated with surveys and data. Sample videotape segments of student interviews can make the words of students more real and immediate. Quick feedback is also important. Staffs do not necessarily want to wait for long reports completed several months later, although a formal report may be important if schools want to share the results with others or establish a baseline of student response. In a baseline report, predictions can be made of how the results should change if the restructuring is having an impact on students (as illustrated in the Eastern middle school). In addition to written reports, staffs need immediate feedback while their enthusiasm over listening to students is strong. Teachers also like to know how *their* students responded; data disaggregated by classroom can be useful, although caution must be exercised to protect student confidentiality and avoid classroom-level sample sizes that are too small for statistical inference.

Our advice for schools and their research partners is to just do it! There are challenges to doing this kind of inquiry and having it make a difference. However, our biggest lesson is that asking students what *they* think is productive and fun works for everyone involved. We have tried to illustrate some different methods and have probably only scratched the surface of possibilities. We encourage others to experiment with these techniques and find even better ways to bring students into the school restructuring conversation.

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Chapter 10

Finding Out What Students Think: One-Day Methods Schools Can Use

The Restructuring Collaborative

Students have a lot to say about schooling. As we have seen in the previous chapters, what they say can stimulate and guide school improvement. This chapter is for schools who would like to find out what *their* students have to say, but who at the same time may feel daunted by the task of mounting a serious research effort to find out. The chapter discusses how schools can systematically gather information from students in a short period of time based on what we as a collaborative have learned from three events held in different schools throughout the country. These three "data-in-a-day" experiences offer insights into organizing to interview students and the information that schools might expect to gain. The strategies we have tried involve school staffs collaborating with researchers to plan and implement the event, but the methods can also be applied by schools working largely on their own.

In one sense, we are reluctant to offer a one-shot professional development activity for eliciting the student voice given the valid criticisms of the one-workshop approaches to school improvement. However, such an event can provide a compelling demonstration of the value of student views on school life with a minimum investment of time and resources. If successful, such one-day events can become part of the yearly school calendar and may lead to other ideas about how to involve students as issues surface. What may initially start off as a one-shot activity can, hopefully, stimulate other avenues for incorporating student voice and involving students in school restructuring.

The work of the collaborative included three data-gathering events at host schools that took between a day and a day-and-a-half to complete. At Juan Perez High School in the Southwest, student interviews focused on the relationship between students' definitions of success in school and the intentions behind recent school improvement efforts (presented as a case study in Chapter 4). The other two events were not presented

as case studies. One was conducted in an Oregon high school where researchers observed classroom activities, then compared them to student interviews concerning what occurred in the class. The group focused on how these experiences reinforced or contradicted the school's goals. The other session, in an Arkansas magnet high school for high-achieving students, addressed matters of school culture and its contribution to the instructional efforts in the school. In this site, focus group interviews with students preceded observations of daily school activities.

These events serve as grist for the following sections on preparing to gather information from students in a day, establishing the focus of the work, analyzing data, developing feedback, and using the information. We also occasionally draw examples and lessons from the other case studies.

Planning and Preparation

Faculty, staff, students, and others should consider several key steps as they plan to gather information about what students are thinking. First, this work is something new for most schools. Teachers often ask questions to assess whether students know information accurately or what their opinion is on a particular topic. However, it is less common for teachers to ask students what they think about their educational learning experience. Consider whether your school has ever done this. If so, how were the activities received in the school? If not, what kinds of responses might you anticipate?

Consider and answer some basic questions before attempting to collect student data: What are we trying to learn about the school? Why are we doing this activity? Who wants this information? How will we use this information? When will we have the data? Who will be involved in the data collection and analysis?

Form a research team to guide the effort and collect the data. We suggest that you involve faculty, the principal, students, school improvement council members, parents, and others who are key stakeholders in your school and community. We believe that forming a team is an important step in generating ownership for the research and the results. Remember, those who are most involved often gain the most from the experience. It is

important to keep your group large and diverse enough to have a core of spokespersons. You can use volunteers or adopt a selection process. After all, this process will take time, energy, effort, and funds.

For example, in the Southwest and Arkansas schools, a large group of student volunteers and faculty interviewed students and analyzed data. Additionally, the principal at each school spent time organizing and preparing for the activities. In both cases, the principals were members of our restructuring collaborative and had visited other schools to assist with data collection.

It is important to prepare the research team to gather information from students. Team members will need to understand the purpose of the study. Have them consider questions such as: What talents are present in this group? What training do we need to do this activity? Do we need to review or practice how to carry out different data collection strategies? Do we need to review procedures in summarizing data from interviews? What about help in developing our interview protocol? Are our questions unbiased and fair? Are there other techniques we need to consider? Do we have the necessary skills and knowledge on staff, or do we need to engage an outside facilitator to assist us? These questions are key for the team to ask and answer before it begins.

Consider whether your school might want to exchange staffs or teams with other schools to do the data collection. One benefit of such an exchange is that people from outside settings provide a fresh perspective. It is important that the team identify available resources to keep the project in line with the budget. For example, will you need to pay an outside facilitator? What about substitute teacher pay? What other expenses will these activities incur?

Finally, think about this entire process as a professional development opportunity for the faculty, staff, students, and other school community members. As members of the restructuring collaborative, we benefited personally and professionally from every school visit we made. Student researchers and participants benefited as much as the adults. Our learnings, over time, helped us refine the activities and suggestions that follow.

Focusing and Designing the Research

Once you have selected your research team and worked through the preparatory steps discussed above, you are ready to focus on the research task. Begin by clearly stating the research questions that are of interest to the school staff and community. What important questions about student learning do people really want or need answered as the school goes about restructuring? Think about questions for which student interviews can provide a fresh perspective – a perspective that may be quite different from adult perceptions or other data. We began our work as a collaborative with a rather broad set of research questions which were later developed into interview questions. Our initial research questions were:

1. What does being a successful learner mean to students?
2. Does being a successful learner inside of school mean the same thing as being a successful learner outside of school?
3. How do students feel they learn best?
4. What do students feel the school and teachers are doing to help them learn?
5. What do students wish the school and teachers were doing to help them learn?

These are good starter questions, but it is also helpful to identify the nitty-gritty issues about school change faced by a particular school. In the Southwest high school, questions about learning were intended to verify whether or not students were sensing changes in school climate, an area of intensive staff effort for several years. A key underlying issue here was: Do student views of learning reflect a positive learning climate marked by caring, respect, and positive relationships between adults and students? Thus, while we began with some rather general questions about student learning, we also identified the specific challenges that each school faced in its own restructuring. The more you can identify specific issues ahead of time, the more focused and useful the results will be.

Research questions can explore new territory about how students view their own learning. They can also confirm, through the eyes of students, what everyone hopes is happening as the school restructures. There is no magic set of questions. They depend on what the school is trying to accomplish, where it is in the restructuring process, and the

burning issues facing the school. Questions should be clear, specific, and limited to no more than four or five so they focus on a manageable set of issues. A research team can formulate the initial questions, but other interested parties should have an opportunity to provide input. This will increase ownership of the research.

Once the research questions have been formulated, the next step is to design the research. There are several things to consider in the research design: 1) how to draw a sample of students to be interviewed, 2) how interviews will be conducted, 3) whether interviews are used alone or in tandem with observations, and 4) organizing the day (or two) of research activities.

Choosing a Sample

In most of our data collection experiences, the aim was to draw a representative sample of students. This usually worked well by randomly selecting students across key variables such as classes, grades, achievement levels, gender, race, etc. However, in the Southwest high school, we interviewed a representative sample of seniors only. This created a small and manageable sample of students to interview during a two-period time block first thing in the morning. While the data was useful, it did not reflect what the whole student body was thinking. The lesson here is that trade-offs may have to be made when there is limited time or scheduling barriers. The strategy in the school above was to interview seniors initially, then interview other classes at a later time.

Designing the Interview Methods

We used different interviewing configurations to gather student data:

- Pairs of interviewers talked to individual students or groups of two or three students
- One or two interviewers facilitated focus groups of seven to ten students
- One interviewer talked to one student (one-on-one interviews)

There is no best way to interview students. The configuration depends on the practical considerations of getting the work done during the school day and working with the established school schedule. Considerations include how many interviewers are available, how many students need to be interviewed, the class and teacher schedules, and

what adjustments can be made in the schedule to accommodate data collection. Interviewing groups of students is more efficient. However, students may answer differently in a group than when they are interviewed as individuals. Interviewed individually, students may feel freer to express personal views rather than echoing what their peers say. On the other hand, the synergy of a group can draw out deeper insights as students react to what other students are saying.

Regardless of how students are interviewed, there should be a written interview guide that lists key questions and provides space for writing answers. Good interview questions should derive directly from the research questions, and should be written in a clear, simple, conversational style that students understand. We generally used open-ended questions (e.g., What are your teachers doing to help you learn?) so students express their views about learning and the school in their own words.

In its simplest form, gathering student views in a day can be carried out by interviewing students, then analyzing and reflecting on their responses. Another variation used in several schools involved a combination of interviews and observations of classroom and school life. In the Oregon high school, we began the day with classroom observations. In each classroom, a pair of observers selected two students within the first ten minutes of observing – one judged to be "engaged" in learning and the other "unengaged" – and then observed their behavior through various classroom learning activities. The observations were followed by interviews in which the students talked about the specific learning activities and how they were helping (or not helping) them learn. In this design, observations were used first to anchor the interview questions into concrete learning experiences (as was also demonstrated in the Eastern middle school, Chapter 5).

In the Arkansas magnet high school, observations were used quite differently. Focus groups conducted the evening before explored student views about the schools core beliefs and values regarding learning and achievement. After analyzing the data the same evening, the research team identified seven broad themes which represented the culture of learning from the point of view of students. The next morning, observations in classrooms and other places in the school were used to confirm or contradict the presence of the

seven cultural elements. In a final discussion at the end of the day, available staff members joined the group and considered how these cultural elements matched their own beliefs, values, and expectations about learning. In this example, interviews were conducted first to elicit student views of school culture followed by observations to document these cultural elements in daily school life. We offer these as two examples of how to integrate interviews with observations.

Organizing the Data Collection and Analysis

The final design consideration is how to organize to complete the data collection and analysis in a day or a day-and-a-half. The biggest challenge is orchestrating the event around the school schedule. In our three events, the research was conducted around the normal school day with students pulled out of classes or free periods for interviewing. Participating faculty researchers were covered by substitues or other teachers. A typical sequence that we followed was to try and complete the data collection by mid- or late-morning. This was followed by a session before lunch where interviewers reviewed individual responses and did some initial categorizing of the data into major themes. After lunch, analysis centered around the major themes with a number of subgroups each taking on one theme. The questions themselves can also be used as an organizer rather than content themes. The subgroups discussed and summarized their findings and then gave short presentations at the end of the school day, when more faculty could be present.

This timeline can work for interview-only designs, but for interviews plus observations, a one-day timeline is difficult. When there is a lot of data to collect (i.e., interviews plus observations or many interviews), a day-and-a-half works better. The research team can begin data collection the day before to get a head start (or the evening before as described earlier for the Arkansas magnet school), then complete the work through the next day. An alternate plan is to spend a day on data collection and initial review, then finish the analysis, reflection and discussion/sharing the next morning. Extending the time is much better than trying to do too much in one day. In the Oregon high school where we conducted both observations and interviews in one day, there was little time and energy for reflection, and the results were left hanging. It is important in

the end for staff to step back and ask: So what does all of this mean for our school? This last discussion and reflection will prove the most interesting and useful.

Collecting Data

As described above, our data collection process involved interviews alone or interviews plus observations with individuals or small groups. With both approaches, researchers need to accurately record what they see and hear. A meeting before the data collection is recommended to explain the process and to give researchers time to ask questions. We learned that data collection worked better if researchers avoided making judgments about what they heard or observed, and concentrated on recording in an objective way. Writing verbatim notes on the structured guide (developed earlier) works best.

We learned a lot about conducting interviews with students. First, we found that friendly conversation helps them feel comfortable. Explain the purpose of the research and assure participants that the interview are confidential. Before beginning the actual interview, ask the interviewee if they have any questions about the research.

During the interviews, researchers limited their own talk so they could concentrate on what was being said. Our questions addressed students in clear, simple language, but not in a condescending way. Researchers encouraged reflective thinking by giving ample time for students to answer questions. This meant tolerating silence, keeping good eye contact and simply asking the student to elaborate on their comments. The interview guide was our starting point; it helped the team members stay focused on common issues. But we went beyond these questions to understand what the interviewees were really saying. In some ways, the interviews were detective work with the researchers following their hunches. At the same time, we had to be cautious so the interview didn't come across like an interrogation. We could learn more about what students were saying by expressing genuine interest. Students were most likely to share when the researcher noticed what sparked student interest. We looked for clues about what was going on in the student's head.

When we didn't understand what a student meant, we would probe for more information. For example, one young man said that being a "good student" helped him to learn. When asked, "What do you mean by good student?" the young man said that being a good student meant never getting sent to the office as a trouble maker. This view differed from other views of what it is to be a "good student," so it was important for the interviewer to explore the meaning.

We learned more if we asked for details, or a description of a specific situation. For example, in the Arkansas magnet high school (a residential school), one of the female students talked about how comfortable the students were with each other. The interviewer asked her to describe a situation in which she felt comfortable. The student told of a fire drill in the middle of the night and how it was not awkward for her classmates to see her in her pajamas. This story provided a realistic sense of what is important from the student's perspective.

The final question in our interviews was open-ended, which gave students a chance to bring up other topics. We would simply ask them to tell us if there was something important that we had not asked. Students said they had rarely been asked about their views before, and some found the experience liberating.

We also learned valuable lessons about conducting classroom observations. Researchers should work in pairs during classroom observations. They should find an unobtrusive place to sit and try to avoid having their presence seriously influence the dynamics of the classroom. Researchers in our schools tried to record what happened as well as what did not happen in classrooms. They referred to their guide frequently to remind them of the types of situations they were interested in documenting. For example, at the Arkansas magnet high school where students helped identify seven cultural themes, the researchers developed a separate sheet of paper for each theme to record observations. When they observed classes, they watched for ways in which the themes came to life. Observers learned more when they looked beyond the surface and watched for non-verbal cues. Students revealed feelings by their energy level or their body language, and we recorded this information on the guide.

We learned that the time immediately after the interview or observation was a crucial time to review, edit, or expand our notes. The notes need to be understood by other members of the research team. We made sure that our schedule left time for researchers to review what they had written and to clean it up.

Analyzing Data

This task requires both technical and intuitive skills. The goal is to be both systematic and thoughtful. The strategies for gathering student views work only to the extent that the group develops an organized way to make meaning of what was heard. From our perspective, "meaning-making" is a synonym for analysis.

Time, of course, is short and a division of labor is inevitable. We assigned small groups one or two of the issues about which data were collected. The groups examined the responses, created categories of answers, and noted how often each was given. This is largely a technical approach; however, it mirrors approaches used in many inquiry-oriented classrooms. Thus, the skills required are not research-specific. It is also relatively easy to arrange, especially if the group agreed early in the day to organize data collection by questions and handled recording such that the question responses could be physically separated. This approach has the additional benefit of making sure that most of the data will be reviewed by the group.

For the most part, this is the strategy that the collaborative used. The problem is that it completes only the technical requirements of the task, and may not address the intricacies of the school and where it should be moving in the future. In other words, the answers to individual questions may be relatively pedestrian, with only a few surprises appearing. The challenge is to move beyond the answers themselves to determine what student responses mean for those who work in the school every day.

For example, in the Southwest high school, students' answers to individual questions were not as powerful as the cumulative realization that students seemed comfortable, safe, and personally cared for in their school. Because the school had concentrated on creating a safe environment in which to work and learn, cross-question

thinking yielded an important affirmation of its progress. By the same token, when researchers looked across the questions, they were also struck by the absence of unsolicited comments about instruction-related activities. "The dog that did not bark," to draw from an old Sherlock Holmes story, pointed the school in the direction it needed to move next – namely, to devise a strong instructional program that took advantage of the emerging learning environment. Thus, collating the data must not take precedence over making meaning of the data.

Meaning-making is a social task. This finally hit home during the Arkansas visit, where we structured time to discuss more fully the results of the individual, subgroup analyses. During this time, the emphasis was on "big picture" ideas, or themes that cut across the more narrow analyses. This enabled the group to see even more clearly the important ideas about the school, such as students serving as informal instructors to other students and the adherence to inquiry as a welcomed norm in all aspects of school life – even when it meant students challenging adults.

A word of caution is in order. Some might consider it advisable to begin the analysis task with the big picture. This would entail having the group generate its impressions of what they saw and heard, develop themes based on these impressions, and search the data to see what kind of support is available. The problem, of course, is that the group might see only what they sought. The advantage of serendipity would be lost.

Analysis as a social event has the advantage of providing immediate feedback to a large number of school stakeholders involved in the task. This is important, largely because more formal attempts at the end of the day could occur at a time when few people are available or willing to engage in substantive discussion.

Developing Feedback

It is important to report the findings of your student interviews to staff, students, parents, and others in the community. We recommend that a report be written as part of your one- or two-day strategy to interview students. A final report may take longer, but a draft of your findings should be completed as part of the established timeline. We make

this a point because one school never completed a report, seriously diminishing the ways in which they could use the information. If the report is a written piece, consider the following areas.

Identify the Audience

The report should be influenced by 1) the purpose of engaging in the processes in the first place, and 2) the needs and nature of your communities. The purpose has been discussed earlier. The audience may be the faculty, students, parents, community members, and school board members. The board and parents may be satisfied with a streamlined version of the findings. On the other hand, faculty and students will value a document that is rich in descriptive detail. For example, when teachers reviewed the original Dickinson student data (Chapter 2), they identified student responses that surprised them as well as responses that confirmed their expectations. The data were summarized by teachers as themes and generalizations of what students expressed at various grade levels. Careful notes of these teacher interpretations of the raw data were recorded by the two external researchers. The researchers organized and produced the written report that represented the teachers comments.

The audience can also determine whether charts, tables, or graphs are used to summarize the information. Teachers seem more engaged with data that reflects the words and thoughts of students. The board will find brief summaries adequate; parents, too, may be satisfied with short statements of results. However, whether brief or lengthy, original student comments should be included across the document to lend credibility to the findings, and to give the report a human dimension.

Assign Author Responsibility

We have found that when report writers are not determined early in the process, the report is not likely to materialize. Simply assuming that someone will take on this role often results in no product.

It is a good idea to have an advocate or champion who supports and guides the student interview process. Advocates may be members of the school improvement team,

school council, or a committee selected to serve for this particular purpose. As part of their commitment, they also may take responsibility for the production of the feedback report. The simple point to make is that it should be clear to everyone who will take the analyzed data and write the report.

If the writers are also the data analyzers, then it is easier to translate the analyses into a meaningful report. One way to increase participation is to assign a different committee of report writers. This also distributes the work load. A caveat, however, is in order: Committees must be involved throughout the process so that a meaningful document results.

The selection of writers may also influence to nature and tone of the report. For example, a "numbers" person may produce a quantitative, or numerically rich, report, while a "word" person, on the other hand, may write descriptive sentences and explanatory paragraphs that create a qualitatively rich report. Each approach has merit, and a balance of text and numerical presentations can be used. Again, the audience should be considered in selecting authors. It is also worthwhile to consider having a school staff member write the report.

Each of the committee members could write a section. Typically, this is done after the day of interviewing students and analyzing the information. Writers will need a quiet place to reflect on their section. The goal is to accurately portray the results in a thoughtful and meaningful way. Writers should share first editions, solicit feedback and make revisions. The purpose of this feedback and revisions process is to create a readable and understandable report for recipients (i.e., faculty, students, parents, community, and board).

Using Student Data for School Improvement

Using the student data means placing the information into the hands of decision makers – teachers, school administrators, other staff, parents, community members, board members, and the students themselves. They are the ones who will give the information meaning in day-to-day practice. For information to make a difference, people must work

with it, interpret it, and decide what to do individually and collectively to change things. Using data is the next step in a continuous learning process and involves reflection and action planning. If information is not used, you may as well not develop it!

To close the learning loop, your research team must plan and conduct activities with decision makers that involve them with the information. It is much more than handing people a written report or making a presentation. They must work with the information. For example, a faculty meeting could be devoted to study and reflection on the information. After a brief overview of the research effort, individuals could study the synthesized information. Small groups of faculty members could reflect on the implications of the information for day-to-day practice in the school. From reflections, the small groups would develop improvements plans. The implications and improvements would be reported to the faculty as the basis for individual and schoolwide action. Similar approaches could be used with school site councils, student groups, local school advisory committees and other groups. The more the better. Understanding the information, interpreting information in light of current practice, formulating ideas for improvement, and agreeing on action plans are important steps to take in using information.

In the Royal High School case (Chapter 3), student researchers presented findings to the school leadership team. In this example, there was no formal process for reflection and action planning based on the information. Some student leaders and at least one parent member of the leadership team felt that the information had an impact on a decision to move to block scheduling, but the connections seemed weak. At least the students presented their findings to faculty leaders and a discussion was held. This is a step in the right direction.

In the Eastern middle school (Chapter 5), outside researchers brought information on student views and other aspects of day-to-day practice and conditions to the faculty. The information took many forms and was presented at many times in many ways. The faculty found it difficult to agree on some changes and to plan actions to make the changes. All steps in the learning process are important if you are to make a difference for students.

Should you decide to use information from a research activity, several considerations will affect your success:

- The data should be summarized into clear categories and presented in simple, easy to understand ways. Having the information in summary data charts and graphic displays helps. When presenting qualitative information, include representative quotes from students.

- Reduce the data to clear, understandable categories, but do not over interpret the information. Indicating that ten or 15 students said that teachers were not available to help them individually is appropriate, for example. Making statements such as students want more teachers to be available to help them individually is less appropriate.

- Employ a variety of strategies to familiarize people with information. Individual reading of short reports, using team learning activities such as the jigsaw, and other techniques can be used. Allow discussion to clarify understanding of the results. Discuss possible interpretations and implications. Interpretations and implications should be reported by each small group, with the larger group determining the common findings and larger themes. Framing learning tasks so that people can work with the data is critical.

- Determine the most important findings from the study, not just the most common ones. Individuals may believe that statements by only one or two students are the most important findings while common findings tend to be what most students said.

In two of our cases, researchers used a game format to involve staff members in interpreting data. Modeled after the game show "Family Feud," we divided the staff into small groups and had them anticipate how the students would respond to questions. While that enlivened the data presentation, there was a more important purpose to the process. We wanted to have the groups discuss whether the reported findings were what they really wanted to hear from students.

In retrospect, we were disappointed that the information from most of our research efforts was used marginally to stimulate learning. The lesson here for schools is to plan more thoroughly for use of the information in the early phases. Don't wait until the end to start thinking about how the data should be used! Using the student information for improvement has high potential for making a difference in the lives of students and staff.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol Used in Dickinson Elementary School
(Chapter 2/Southwest Educational Development Laboratory[1])

[1] This instrument was developed by the Applied Research Project at Research for Better Schools, Philadelphia. It was used by SEDL with permission.

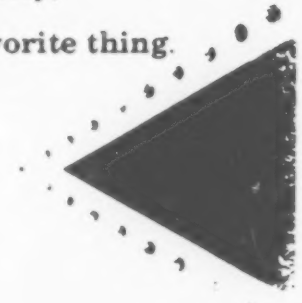
by _____

School is a big part of your life and so is what you do out of school. This book is for you to tell your story of what you do at school and after school everyday, and what is important to you about both. This book is for you to ask yourself questions — like a reporter on TV or in the newspapers — and to write your answers. You can also draw and color pictures, and write poems and stories. You can be a reporter, an illustrator, and an author in your book as you tell your story of school and home. Have fun!

My Favorite Thing

Here is a place for you to draw a picture, tell a story,

write a poem, or make up a rap about you doing your **favorite thing**.



About Me

My nickname is: _____

I am _____ years old.

I am in the _____ grade.

My teacher's name is: _____

I have _____ sisters.

I have _____ brothers.

My Favorite:

School subject: _____

Book: _____

Thing to do at school: _____

Thing to do after school: _____

✔ Put a check in the box beside the answer that fits you best, and finish the sentence.

❒ I am a **good** student. I know that I am a good student because: _____

_____

❒ I am an **average** student. I know that I am an average student because: _____

_____

❒ I am a **poor** student. I know that I am a poor student because: _____

_____

✔ Put a check in the box beside the answer that fits you best, and finish the sentence:

❒ **I think I can** change the kind of student I am. I feel that way because: _____

_____

_____

❒ **I do not think I can** change the kind of student I am. I feel that way because:

_____

_____

About School

I am involved in these school activities (such as basketball, safety patrol, etc.):

My **favorite** thing to do at school is:

This is my **favorite** thing to do because:

My **least favorite** thing to do at school is:

This is my **least favorite** thing to do because:

If I could learn about anything, I would like to learn:

I think school should help me to:

I come to school because:

I **want** to do my schoolwork when:

I **do not** want to do my schoolwork when:

People at school I care about are: _____

_____

They know I care about them because: _____

_____

People who care about me at school are: _____

_____

I know they care about me because: _____

_____

In School I am Usually:

happy because: _____

_____

sad because: _____

_____

angry because: _____

_____

excited because: _____

_____

bored because: _____

_____

✔ Put a check in the box beside the answer that fits you best, and then finish the sentence:

☐ It **is** important to me that I do well in school because: _____

_____

☐ It **is not** important to me to do well in school because: _____

_____

The **best thing** that ever happened to me at school was: _____

_____

_____

The **worst thing** that ever happened to me at school was: _____

_____

_____

To me, a successful student is: _____

_____

_____

Things that I can do to become successful are: _____

_____

_____

If I were talking to students who were new at this school, I would tell them that to be successful they need to: _____

_____

_____

Things that my teachers can do to help me become successful are: _____

_____

_____

Something I am **proud** of is: _____

_____

_____

Something I **need to improve** on is: _____

_____

_____

Here is a place for you to draw a picture, tell a story,
write a poem, or make up a rap about **being at school**.

About Teachers

Something my teacher **says** a lot is: _____

_____

I think my teacher says that a lot because: _____

_____

Something my teacher **does** a lot in the classroom is: _____

_____

I think my teacher does that a lot because: _____

_____

My teacher **thinks** it is important to: _____

_____

I know that because: _____

_____

Teachers **like** it when students: _____

_____

Teachers **do not** like it when students: _____

_____

A **good** teacher is one who: _____

_____

A **bad** teacher is one who: _____

_____

I think teachers let you know what they want you to do by: _____

_____

My teacher could make school more interesting by: _____

_____

The kind of teacher I would most like to have would be: _____

_____

My Teacher

Here is a place for you to draw a picture, tell a story, write a poem, or make up a rap about your teacher.

In My Classroom

If I were going to tell you about a normal day in my classroom, I would say: _____

_____

_____

_____

✔ Put a check in the box beside the answer that fits you best, and then finish the sentence:

❒ I usually **understand** what is going on in my classroom. I know I understand because: _____

_____

❒ I usually **do not understand** what is going on in my classroom. I know I do not understand because: _____

_____

Things teachers do that help me understand are: _____

_____

_____

I know I **have done well** in class when: _____

_____

_____

I know I **have not done** well in class when: _____

_____

_____

To be a good student in class, I have to: _____

_____

_____

The kind of student my teacher would say was successful would be: _____

_____

_____

Talk, Talk, and More Talk!

You, your teacher, and other students all talk in your classroom. This is a page for you to tell about what it sounds like in your classroom every day.

✔ **Put a check in the box beside the answer that you think best answers each question.**

The **most** talking in my classroom is done by:

❒ my teacher ❒ other students ❒ me

The **least** talking in my classroom is done by:

❒ my teacher ❒ other students ❒ me

Other students talk the most to:

❒ my teacher ❒ other students ❒ me

I talk the most to:

❒ my teacher ❒ other students

My **teacher** talks the most to:

❒ other students ❒ me

The other students usually talk about these kinds of things: _____

_____

_____

I usually talk about these kinds of things: _____

_____

_____

My teacher usually talks about these kinds of things: _____

_____

_____

In My Neighborhood

Something that happens **all the time** in my neighborhood is: _____

_____

_____

_____

Good things that happen in my neighborhood are: _____

_____

_____

Bad things that happen in my neighborhood are: _____

_____

_____

Summer things that happen in my neighborhood are: _____

_____

_____

Winter things that happen in my neighborhood are: _____

_____

_____

If I was going to tell someone about **a normal day in my neighborhood,** I would say this is what happens everyday: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My Family

Here is a place for you to draw a picture, tell a story, write a poem, or make up a rap about your family.

I Learn

I learn best when I: _____

_____

_____

That is the best way for me to learn because: _____

_____

_____

Activities in class (like doing worksheets, listening to the teacher, working with other students, working with the teacher) that **help** me learn best are: _____

_____

_____

Activities that **do not help** me learn are: _____

_____

_____

I learn best when other students: _____

_____

Things I like to learn about are: _____

_____

✔ Put a check in the box beside the answer that fits you best, and then finish the sentence.

❒ Homework **helps** me with learning because: _____

_____

_____

❒ Homework **does not help** me with learning because: _____

_____

_____

When I Grow Up

If I were going to describe the kind of person I am, I would say:

_____

_____

If I were going to describe the kind of person I would like to be, I would say I would like to be: _____

_____

_____

When I grow up, I want to be: _____

_____

_____

I want to be that when I grow up because: _____

_____

_____

Things that I will need to know about when I grow up are: _____

_____

_____

Something I would like to change about my life is: _____

_____

_____

Something I would like to change about my school is: _____

_____

_____

Something I would like to change about the world is: _____

_____

_____

Grown-Up

Here is a place for you to draw a picture, tell a story,

write a poem, or make up a rap about yourself as a **grown-up**.

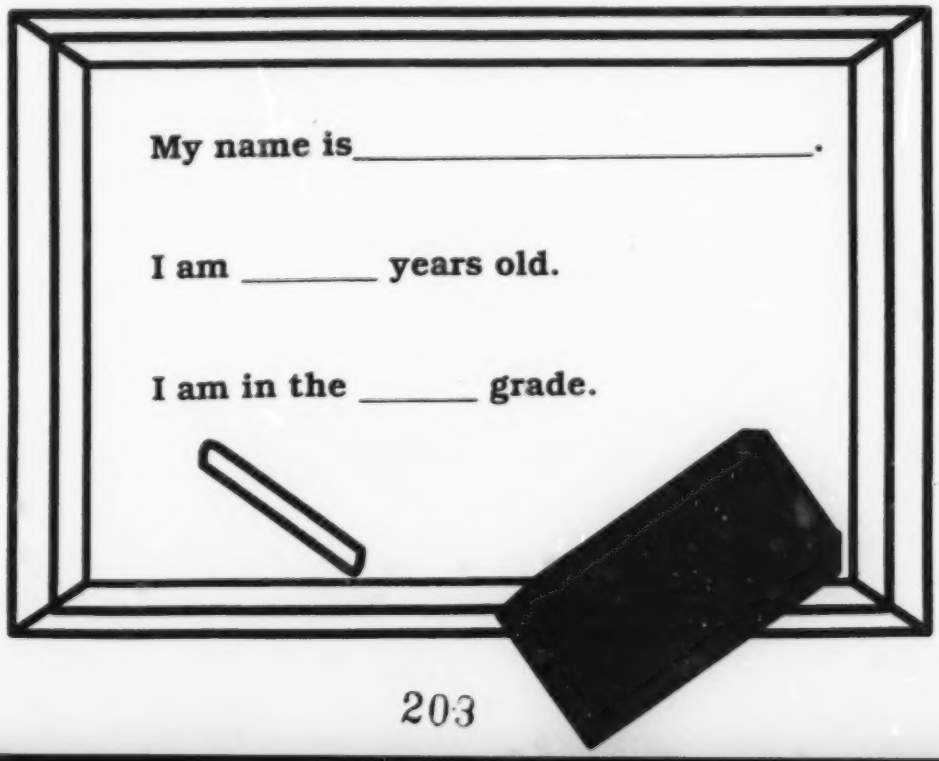
Appendix B

Survey Instrument Used in Eastern Middle School
(Chapter 5/Research for Better Schools)

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT SURVEY

The adults at your school are working hard to make your school a better place for students to learn. To do that, they need to know how you feel about your experiences at school and what is important to you. The questions in this book are meant to help you share your thoughts and give teachers and the principal your advice about how to improve things.

Please, keep in mind that **no one at your school will read your book.** Instead we, the researchers from Research for Better Schools in Philadelphia, will read what you write and then report what students in general had to say. In other words, we might say that some students at Lockerman dislike cafeteria food, but we would never say which students held that opinion. **This is your chance to help make a difference; we hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to share what you think. Thank you!**



Myself

My Favorite:

School subject_____.

Book_____.

Thing to do at school_____.

Thing to do after school_____.

Favorite Thing:

Here is a space for you to draw a picture, tell a story,
write a poem, or make a rap about you doing your favorite thing.

1. I **(✔check one)** ☐ **am** ☐ **am not** a successful student, because_____

_____

_____.

2. I think I can change the kind of student I am **(✔ check one)** ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**.

I feel that way because _____

_____

_____.

3. In my opinion, a successful student is_____

_____

_____.

4. Things that I can do to help me to be a successful student are_____

_____

_____.

5. Things that my teachers can do to help me to be a successful student are

_____

_____.

6. Things a new student at this school would need to know to be successful are

_____

_____.

7. What makes you **work** in school?_____

_____

_____.

8. What makes you **not work** at school?_____

_____

_____.

School

9. My **favorite** thing to do at school is_____

_____.

I like this the most because_____

_____.

10. My **least** favorite thing to do at school is_____

_____.

I like this the least because_____

_____.

11. Describe how you feel about coming to school:_____

_____

_____.

12. People who care about me at this school are_____

_____.

13. I know they care because_____

_____.

14. People I care about at this school are_____

_____.

15. They know I care about them because_____

_____.

16. Think of all the grown-ups that you see in this school. Which of them in particular help make school a good place for you to be?_____

_____.

17. How do they make school a good place for you to be?_____

_____

_____.

18. Was the move from elementary school to middle school **(✔ check one)** ☐ **easy** ☐ **difficult?** Why?_____

_____

_____.

19. Something I like better about **middle school** is_____

_____.

20. Something I liked better about **elementary school** is_____

_____.

21. Were you a student at this school last year? **(✔ check one)** ☐**yes** ☐**no**. If **yes**, is it different here this year? **(✔ check one)** ☐**yes** ☐**no.** If **yes**, how is it different?_____

_____

_____.

22. Do you think what you do in school will **help** you in the future?**(✔check one)** ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**. Why? _____

_____

_____.

23. Describe what kind of person you would like to be:_____

_____

_____.

24. It **(✔ check one)** ☐ **is** ☐ **is not** important to me that I do well in school because_____

_____

_____.

25. What I think I should get out of school is _____

_____

_____.

In Class

Please answer the following questions about ____ SCIENCE _____class

26. I **usually understand** what is going on when I am in this class **(✔check one)** ☐**yes** ☐**no.**

27. Things the teacher in this class **does** that help me understand are_____

_____

_____.

28. I know **I have** done well in this class when_____

_____

_____.

29. I know **I haven't** done well in this class when _____

_____

_____.

30. Describe the kind of learner the teacher of this class would say was successful:_____

_____

_____.

31. Do you feel like you get good grades by working hard or by being smart? **(✔ check one)** ☐ **working hard** ☐ **being smart** ☐ **other.** Describe why you feel that way:_____

_____

_____.

Teachers

32. Something my teachers **say** a lot is_____

_____

_____.

They say that because_____

_____

_____.

33. Something my teachers **do** a lot in their classrooms is_____

_____

_____.

They do that because_____

_____

_____.

34. My teachers **think** it is important to_____

_____

_____.

I know they think that is important because_____

_____

_____.

35. Teachers **like** it when_____

_____

_____.

36. Teachers **don't like** it when_____

_____

_____.

Learning

37. The kind of teacher **I learn best** from is_____

_____

_____.

38. The kind of teacher **I don't learn** from is_____

_____

_____.

39. Do your teachers make sure you know what they expect of you? **(✔ check one) ☐ yes ☐ no.** How do they let you know?_____

_____

_____.

40. How can teachers make learning more interesting for you?_____

_____

_____.

41. I learn **best** when_____

_____

_____.

I learn best then because_____

_____

_____.

42. Do other students affect or have an impact on your learning? **(✔ check one) ☐yes ☐no.** How?_____

_____

_____.

Activities

43. You do lots of activities in your classes. Think of the ones that are most helpful and least helpful. Please fill in the blanks with some of these activities and then check (✔) whether each activity **helps you learn or doesn't help you learn.** Finish by describing **how** each activity you listed helps or doesn't help you learn.

ACTIVITIES:

(1) _____ ☐ helps me learn ☐ doesn't help me learn. Because _____

_____.

(2) _____ ☐ helps me learn ☐ doesn't help me learn. Because _____

_____.

(3) _____ ☐ helps me learn ☐ doesn't help me learn. Because _____

_____.

(4) _____ ☐ helps me learn ☐ doesn't help me learn. Because _____

_____.

(5) _____ ☐ helps me learn ☐ doesn't help me learn. Because _____

_____.

Parents/Home

44. My parents or guardians come to school when_____

_____

_____.

45. When my parents or guardians talk about school they usually say_____

_____

_____.

46. Are you **encouraged** by adults at home to do well at school? **(✔ check one)** ☐ **yes** ☐ **no.**

47. If **yes**, who encourages you?_____

_____

_____.

48. If **yes**, how do they encourage you?_____

_____

_____.

49. When you have a problem at home who can you go to?_____

_____

_____.

50. Do your parents'/guardians' views about this school affect how you feel about the school **(✔ check one)** ☐ **yes** ☐ **no.**

51. If **yes**, how does it affect the way you feel?_____

_____

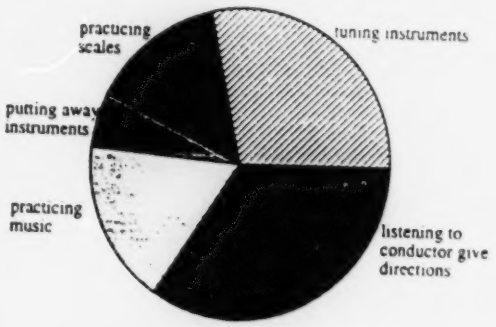
_____.

WORK, WORK, WORK!

52. Imagine a typical day in _____ SCIENCE _____ class and think about the kinds of work you usually do. Now, fill in the pie chart pictured below to show how much time you spend doing different kinds of classwork. You will need to do **two** things. **First,** you will need to **make your own key** to explain the kinds of work you do. **Second,** you will need to **figure out how much time** you typically spend doing each activity. To help you think about how to do this, here is an example of a chart of what kinds of things a student might say they do during band class on a typical day.

KEY

- tuning our instruments
- practicing scales together
- practicing music we choose ourselves
- listening to conductor give directions
- putting away our instruments



KEY

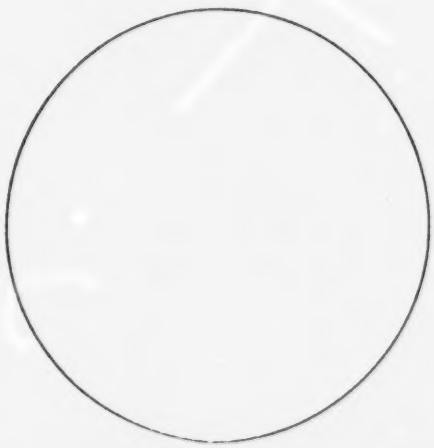
☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____



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Services

53. When you have a problem at school, who can you go to?_____

_____

_____.

54. What do they do to help you?_____

_____

_____.

55. Do you feel like you have opportunities to get involved in your school?

(✔ check one) ☐ yes ☐ no. If yes, what are they? _____

_____

_____.

56. Do you feel like you have opportunities to get involved in your community?

(✔ check one) ☐ yes ☐ no. If yes, what are they? _____

_____

_____.

57. Are there special programs at school to help you if you have problems?

(✔ check one) ☐ yes ☐ no. If yes, what are they? _____

_____

_____.

58. How do students find out about special programs?_____

_____

_____.

Appendix C

Interview Guide Used in California Schools
(Chapter 6/Far West Laboratory)

STUDENT INTERVIEW FORM

NOTE: Questions should be concrete or contextualized; i.e. initially approached from the lesson you observed.

Name:
Grade:
Age:
How long in school:

1. *CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION IMPACT*

A. Impact of curriculum content. [Curricular relevance: Meaning centered, relevant to lives]

Are the things you're learning about ____in this class interesting to you? Why or why not?

Has the teacher ever asked you or the other students what you want to study about? When?

B. Impact of teaching style. [Classroom experience: Purpose, understanding, interest in lesson/unit/project]

What were you doing in the lesson? What was _____ about?

Did you understand everything the teacher asked you to do?

Is this a typical lesson?

Is there a certain way that teachers can help you understand what you are learning better?

2. *MEASURING SUCCESS*

A. Definition of success.

Are you a successful student? What does that mean?

Do you think other students in the class are successful? Who? Why?

B. Impact of restructuring.

What do teachers (and others) or the school do to help you become successful?

Has participating in (aspect of restructuring) (e.g. a family, thematic projects, extended blocks of time) helped you do better in school? Why?

Is this a good school? Why or why not?

3. ***PREVENTION***

Is this class hard? What's your hardest class? Why?

What do teachers (and others) do these days to help you when a class is hard? Is that different than a few years ago?

4. ***INTEGRATION.***

Are kids divided into different groups in this class/school? Do you do different things?

Which group are you in? Can you change groups?

Appendix D

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Contact Information for Authors

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